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FURNISHED APARTMENTS.



I AM one of those nomadic beings who at one time or another have had a great deal to do with furnished apartments. My experiences are of a somewhat chequered, and, on the whole, of a gloomy nature. If I were disposed to generalize and attempt a broad classification, I should say that when people are very clean and particular they are not over honest, and when they are very honest, as a rule, they are rather

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dirty. I remember one old lady, in particular, who would send me up stairs stray waifs of tea and sugar after I had been absent for months, but whose apartments were rendered uninhabitable by those noxious creatures now generally known as Norfolk Howards. I have known, too, clean and pretty landladies, but there was a metallic twinkle in their smile, and the pleasant voice surprisingly changed its key if any

inaccuracy was pointed out in the accounts. Once or twice I have met with landladies, so thoroughly ladylike and good, that when my personal interest in them has caused me to inquire into their history, I have found that some reverse of fortune has induced them to adopt their line of life as means for adding to their scanty resources. I remember descanting with some eloquence on this subject to an experienced friend, speaking of a charming landlady in whom and in whose family I felt greatly interested. He admitted all I said, but added with a depth of wisdom which, at the time, I failed to appreciate, 'Nevertheless landladies are landladies.' What he meant was, that the nicest people, in a surprisingly short time, adapt themselves to the circumstances in which they find themselves placed, and lose that refinement of feeling and acting for which they find little scope in their new sphere. It would be very easy to adopt the Mrs. Lirriper side of the argument, and represent the landladies in a very pleasing, and the lodgers in a very vexatious light; but there is a *per contra* to be stated; and here, as elsewhere, we must arbitrate between the contending interests.

I myself have run through the whole gamut of the question of furnished apartments. There was one big London house, to which, in my bachelor days, I was greatly attached. I have occupied every portion of that house from drawing-room floor to attic. I liked the second floor best; they were pleasant and moderate. But if I found them engaged, when I made a flying visit to town, I took the drawing-room set; and if the whole house was full, I would ask for a shake-down somewhere, and take refuge in an attic. The sympathising reader will understand how useful it was to have a regular crib in town, whither you might alight however suddenly and unexpectedly, and be sure of a greeting and a bed. I found that I liked the best rooms a great deal the best, and did not at all philosophically betake myself to the attic. I discovered

two things. First, the way in which you were lodged made a great difference in your own self-esteem. You talked, or lounged, or wrote your letters, or received your friends with a great deal more ease and pleasure when you did so in state than when you did so in the rough. Secondly, it made a great difference in the esteem in which others held you. I do not simply mean servants and tradespeople, who, of course, would form their notions from such circumstances. But even the landlady's own people, although you chivalrously declined to alter your payment with the altered accommodation, gave you more respect in the drawing-room than when you were up amongst the skylights. Consequently the topmost regions became abhorred localities; and when I came in by a late train and found them the only places vacant, I would hurl myself into a Hansom and dash down to Covent Garden. I am afraid this change of location somewhat injured my credit with my aunt, and certainly did not improve my substance. In this way, gradually and repeatedly, I severed my connection with one of the few really good lodging-houses I have ever known.

I remember visiting a distinguished friend who occupied uncommonly seedy apartments under somewhat unusual and remarkable circumstances. He had fallen in love at the theatre with a very pretty and a very promising young actress. The infatuation grew upon him. He would be found every night at a certain stall whenever this young woman had some minor part to sustain, where her good looks and pleasant manners would effectually tell. She was a very good girl, I subsequently discovered, belonging to a family which for generations had trod the boards as a profession, and helping to support an invalid father out of her scanty earnings. Molesworth—only the name was not Molesworth—was as modest and sincere a lover as a good girl could deserve. He contrived to find out that the young lady and her sister occupied furnished apartments in Lower Bel-

gravin, that is, some back street in Pimlico. A brilliant thought occurred to Molesworth. He would go and take rooms at the same house. There was a difficulty, however. The only decent rooms were the Lilliputian drawing-room floor, and these were occupied by our histrionic young friend and her sister at sixteen shillings a week. There was, however, a bedroom to be obtained for five shillings a week. Molesworth took the room, and it was in this poetic seclusion that he wrote his five act tragedy, which was subsequently declined, with perfect unanimity, by all the London managers. Molesworth, however, was one of those good fellows who are always on brotherly intimacy with a great number of other good fellows. From some of these he was quite unable to keep the secret of his real address. These men, perhaps happily for Molesworth, completely ruined these deep-laid plans. He and Miss Carstairs were beginning to be good friends. She smiled when she met him on the staircase; and one afternoon they actually had some confabulation in the little drawing-room. But men in broughams came rattling up to the door of the little lodgings to inquire after the occupant of the back bedroom. Officers of the army, with clinking sabres, knocked him up at unearthly hours of the night. Cases of wine and parcels of books would come in for him. Soon the whole of the little household became fully aware that there was some mystery in the wind, and that the obscure lodger was other than he seemed. The Misses Carstairs took the alarm. An extensive acquaintance with dramatic villains caused them to entertain all kinds of melodramatic ideas of intended wickedness. The pleasant little intercourse, in which Molesworth was beginning to declare himself in the character of an ardent lover, was peremptorily cut short by the elder sister. Then Molesworth sat down, and with consummate eloquence, made a formal offer of himself. These honest proposals were treated as only a further progression in his unhalloved plot. There was no

notice taken of it beyond the intimation that either they or he must leave the house. Under these circumstances, Molesworth returned to his beaten path in life, and confessed that his five shilling lodging had given him a new zest for the luxuries of civilization. He soon afterwards encountered that titled lady who subsequently became the Honourable Mrs. Molesworth. Lucy Carstairs lost for the present that chance of a brilliant settlement, which, in all probability, her beauty and talents will yet secure for her.

My reader, are you in search of furnished apartments? If so, before you set out, I can predicate, to a considerable extent, a great deal of what is going to happen to you. There are two classes of people for whom lodging-house keepers have a great and natural preference. These are for bachelors and for married people with large families; provided always, that is to say, that they are well off in the world. The great horror of the lodging-house people is the smart City man who wants to compound for board and an airy bedroom for a guinea a week. Their great liking is for such a case as I am about to adduce. Young Osborne has some really noble rooms in one of the central squares, not far from the British Museum. For these he pays three guineas a week. I have never yet been able to discover the benefit he derives from the very superior accommodation which belongs to him. His avocations keep him busy the whole of the day. He belongs to one or two clubs. He enters very largely into society, where he is as amiable as he is eligible. I have never yet heard of his spending an hour in his rooms. The landlady and her family have the free run of them, and entertain their friends there. I am sure Osborne, a very good sort of fellow, would make no objection. You see they have let off the whole of their house, except a little room on the basement next to the kitchen, which they have turned into a sort of parlour. The poor things are all the better for the better rooms in which the good-natured Osborne allows them to

disport themselves. 'Bless your soul, my dear fellow,' said a bachelor friend of mine to me the other day, 'that old landlady of mine, with whom I have been staying for the last dozen years, fondly imagines that she lets furnished apartments, and of course I pay for them as such. There is not a stick in the place that belongs to her. I have run up my own bookcases, and there are all my old favourite dogs and beauties on the walls, and I have laid down a new carpet, and have gradually extirpated, bit by bit, all her old furniture for what I like better.' Certainly bachelors of this kind are deservedly popular.

If you are in very easy circumstances, and have a large family, and have heavy and expensive dinners, this also renders you a very desirable inmate of furnished apartments. But then it is necessary to wink at a good deal of waste and extravagance, or rather waste and extravagance are hardly the proper terms, for your goods are not squandered, but carefully 'sequestered' into alien uses. Lodging-house keepers will gladly lower their rent if they see that the expenditure will be liberal, and the supervision not too strict. But I know a case in which a lady kept her accounts with much accuracy, and perhaps economy, and the justly offended landlady declared that they could only stay by paying a higher rent. I remember occupying some lodgings at Oxford with a friend. Our landlady sent up a fine piece of hot roast beef, of which we took as many ounces as there were pounds. We were asked for orders for next day's dinner, and named cold roast beef. Our landlady confiscated the first joint as a perquisite, and ordered for us a second large joint, which she gave us cold next day, and in due course confiscated that also. I merely give this as a specimen of proceedings which have come under my own observation. One such harpy—it was at Hastings—received a measure of poetic justice. She served one of her lodgers in a ludicrously bad way. The lodger was one of the most illustrious contributors to 'Punch.' He retaliated

on his victimiser by a faithful portraiture in 'Punch' of all that he was obliged to undergo at his landlady's remorseless hands. The knowledge of the joke spread, and covered her with as much shame and confusion as her rhinoceros-hided nature was susceptible of feeling.

Some time back I had a good deal to do with furnished apartments; and in the course of a few weeks I must have visited a hundred different sets. The dialogues with the landladies were generally exceedingly brief. To find exactly what one wants is always a very difficult thing; so a disappointment was the general rule. 'What apartments do you please to require, sir?' — 'Two sitting-rooms and two bedrooms.' 'We have only one sitting-room,' or 'only one bedroom.' 'Thank you; good morning.' The dialogue only lasted a few seconds. To some, it was a great objection that we brought servants. To others, the presence of children was a decisive objection. Sometimes the terms were too high; sometimes they were too low. There was the suspicion, which I am told is often a very valid one, that lodging-house keepers will receive lodgers for the sake of a little ready money, when they are about to disappoint their own landlord, or become insolvent. Sometimes we asked for references, and the very request was looked upon as insulting. Let me say it is of no use to be a 'wandering Christian,' and say you will call again; no use to waste other people's time and your own by unmeaning inquiries. I should say that two minutes and a half is almost enough time to settle the question, at least *prima facie*. If you intend to stay some time, you cannot be too particular about the solvency and respectability of the householder whose rooms you propose to occupy. Many of us could tell some rather queer stories under this head. Some landladies only look for money from their tenants, and are regardless of other considerations. You may have taken your lodgings, which may seem very nice, but a little confidential conversation with a policeman may reveal some very curious

antecedents on the part of your predecessors. Again, I have heard of some heartbreaking cases, in which valuable property belonging to lodgers, who could ill afford to lose such, has been seized by the bailiffs for the debts of the landlady. It is very curious to note how the rent of apartments increases as you go westwards. I think the best and cheapest are in the neighbourhood of the central squares. You find there is a regular tariff there, and quite uniform. Even the variation of eightpence shows the variation of the presence or absence of some little comfort. When we get into the region of Piccadilly, I have climbed staircase after staircase over a bootmaker's shop, and have been asked a very large sum for miserable rooms; and when I criticised the appointments, I was informed that they were good enough for Members of Parliament who had lodged there. It is to be remembered that the rent is only a part of the expenses. You have often to supply the whole house with milk and cheese, wood and coal, bread and butter. You consume a ton of coal, in a fancy grate of your sitting-room, in an incredibly small space of time. Worse than all, your milk is adulterated; and, where there are little children, the adulteration of milk is a crime, for their growth is checked, and death is sometimes slowly induced. Many of us have heard of very ingenious plans which have been adopted to check or expose the 'irregularities'—that is the polite equivalent for 'swindling'—of landladies. One man vindictively arranged some crockery in such a way that when his cupboard was feloniously entered there was a universal crash. One landlady came and told her lodger that his brandy was all gone, and that he required more. 'Oh dear, no,' was the reply; 'you have finished a bottle which I have not touched, but left in your way; I have kept a private bottle for myself elsewhere, which is not half finished!'

Let me here say that I entertain most grateful recollections of some of my landladies. I remember some sisters at St. Leonards, whose tastes

in cookery were exquisite, and who were scrupulously honest to the uttermost farthing. I remember once being in lodgings in London, where my landlord was my absolute admiration. He was attentive to a degree; would quietly arrange my dressing materials, make every due preparation, and anticipated my every want. I told him that he was not only an excellent landlord, but the most estimable of valets. He replied that he had for many years been valet to the celebrated Earl of D—, and was very glad to resume his old duties. Other pleasing reminiscences might be adduced; but I am sorry to report that they hardly bear a fair proportion to the gloomier examples. One occurrence especially dwells in my memory, in my lodging-houses experience, of a very graphic and mysterious kind, as I think my readers will consider it to be, if I can succeed in setting before them an accurate description of the facts. One year we found ourselves in town for the gloomy months of a London winter. We engaged apartments in one of the oldest parts of the West End. It was a house which depended almost entirely on its season visitors, and which was all but shut up for a great part of the year. The people of the house were therefore glad to have a somewhat unusual chance of letting; and I obtained, for comparatively few guineas, what in the spring and early summer would let for a good many. I remember being greatly struck by the vast size and many capabilities of the house. I wondered very much how such a house ever came to be a lodging-house. I remember distinctly that I heard all about the circumstances once; but the landlady's flow of narrative, though eloquent, was tedious, and my recollections are only of a vague description. So far as I remember, the house came into her possession in a somewhat romantic and unusual way; and there was no rent to pay, except a ground-rent only moderately heavy. Let me suppose—it will be as near the truth as any other supposition to which I may attach my confused

notions of the landlady's history—that a morose old bachelor lived in the vast, lonely house, and bequeathed it, at his death, to his morose old housekeeper; and from this old lady it came into the possession of a niece who waited upon her for many dull years, but evidenced ultimately a livelier tone of mind by marrying, and bringing into the world several passably pretty daughters.

My acquaintance with the nobility is limited; but I know at least a couple of ducal cadets who might have envied me my 'diggins,' if the amplitude of the location went for much. If I had only put into the large hall a powdered porter, in a large chair, I might myself have passed for a duke or ducal offshoot. My friends told me that they entered my drawing-room as if they were entering a church, fully impressed by the solemnity of vastness. The house was remarkable for extending back an unusual distance rearwards. When we first took the rooms, we were shown over the house with a great deal of conscious pride by the proprietress, with the sort of air which a showman adopts in exhibiting a giant. My wife noticed, however, that a set of rooms in the extreme rear of the house were not exhibited, and, rather manifestly, our attention was not allowed to be directed to them. One day, from accident or curiosity, the young lady essayed to open the door of a passage or corridor which led to this part of the house; but the feat was unachievable. I ought to say that the furniture of the house somewhat detracted from the grandeur. I do not know why our drawing-room should not be called a dining-room, except that there was another frightfully huge room to which that title was assigned. There had been, certainly, a highly unsuccessful attempt to give an airy, drawing-room appearance to the solid substantialities around. A few light sofas, and ottomans and working-tables, and a trifle in the way of mirrors, all of which the sombre, cathedral-like room swallowed up immediately, and, unsatiated, hungered for more.

I remember very well, in the early

dusk of a January afternoon, sitting and musing; the ample grate piled high with a fire which sent ruddy but fitful gleams into the uncertain recesses, and the lamp and pair of candles dismally enjoying themselves with playing at giving light; I remember very well, I say, thinking that my surroundings might not be a bad subject for a picture, nor yet a bad scenery for some situation in a story. The weather was too severe for me to take my walks abroad; but I remember that I took a very vigorous constitutional in the drawing-room, and thought it the next spacious promenade to Hyde Park. Then I rested, satisfied with the picturesqueness of the ineffectual light striving to pierce the shadows, but, at the same time, as dissatisfied as any despot with my empty grandeur, and regretting the coyness and comforts which had belonged to the snug little apartments of bachelor days, where every inch of space was turned to account with books and pictures. This waste of space—this expenditure of room, rather irritated me, as being waste, and I greatly preferred former quarters in Peckwater Quad, or up a staircase in the Temple.

Something happened one night, which has also happened in the 'Mysteries of Udolpho,' but not, I believe, elsewhere. I had fallen asleep on the drawing-room sofa. My nights had been very restless of late, but I had fortunately met with some publication that never failed to exercise a soothing and somnolent effect. I remember when I was a very young man, and very much bent on improving my mind, I made a point of reading Coleridge's 'Aids to Reflection' for three quarters of an hour every day after dinner, which, by inducing a very gradual and very salutary nap, proved invaluable Aids to Digestion. I was at that time very much bent on reforming the universe; but my friends and relatives leaned to the opinion that I should rather reform my tailor's bills. I had, then, been reading some such sleep-compelling publication—was it Mansel's 'Prolegomena Logica' (highly to be recommended for this purpose)? or

some Bampton Lectures (likewise not inefficacious)? when I stole off into the dream-world of other entities and accidents. I awoke, still half sleeping, but catching the tone of a little clock on the mantelpiece striking two. Just at this moment there came a tremendous crash against the door. I started up, trembling. It seemed as if the door had been crashed open, and an armed man had strode into the apartment. I flew to the door. The door was locked. I listened attentively. All was silent. I slowly opened the door. Nothing was to be seen. Thereat I deeply meditated. I thought of John Wesley's experience at Epworth, and of the marvellous and ghostly noises which for months were the companions of the remarkable family at that memorable parsonage. I may remark that there are no historical or legal facts established on better evidence than these supernatural occurrences; and if we sweep them away, I do not see what reason there is for any doctrine of evidence. It occurred to my perturbed mind—perhaps distempered by this remarkable occurrence at this dread hour—that possibly some malignant or playful demon might have selected me for a long series of experiments in spiritualism.

I asked the servant—she had been in her place a great number of years—when she lighted the fire next morning, whether she had heard any noise, and the woman replied very distinctly in the negative. My wife, however, subsequently remarked that the woman 'looked as though she knew something.'

The next occurrence was simply horrible. *Horresco referens*. It came to pass in this wise. In the middle of the night I was suddenly awoken by my wife. 'Horatio!' she said, for so is the partner of her joys and sorrows named. She could say no more. I found her in a state of uncontrollable agitation. At last, but with much difficulty, she was soothed and quieted. Then she told me a very strange story. She had awoken some time before, she said. She was not certain what had awoken her, but she rather thought it was

some noise. She had turned to speak to Horatio, but Horatio slept profoundly. Then she lay quiet and half-listeningly. Suddenly, close by the bed, she felt some hot human breath 'close to her face. In blind instinctiveness she threw out her hand. Her hand clasped an arm, which was suddenly withdrawn. Again she listened, and heard, or thought she heard, noises in the room. So she awoke me, as has been just related. I deemed the story the result of nervousness and imagination; but still I listened. Then I also heard a muffled sound, as if of footsteps noiselessly stealing over the thick carpet. The room was pitchy dark. We had unwisely neglected the precaution of having lighting materials by us. My own notion was that some burglar was in the room. I went to the dressing-table and took a razor out of the case. Then I moved about the room. I fancied I heard some one else move about the room. At any moment there might be an encounter. But the noises quite ceased. I went to the staircase landing; but the whole house was wrapped in the profoundest repose. I began to think that the noises only existed in my fancy, unduly excited by the story I had heard. The only other fact to be mentioned in relation to this occurrence is that, in the morning, the bedroom door was discovered to be wide open. My wife was exceedingly positive that she had closed but not fastened it. I could not myself speak with any positiveness on the subject.

Somehow or other, we had come to be on very good terms with our landlady. I do not know why this should be the case. The wretched woman cheated us with a vigour and perseverance to which my experience afforded but few parallels. The house-books showed that she charged us quite fancy prices for articles which were hardly eatable and drinkable from their most indifferent quality. But she had a large house upon her hands, and times were very dull, and she had had many troubles. Mrs. Horatio has a great weakness for listening to people's troubles, and she gave me the

second editions of some very lachrymose narratives. Among the rest, I heard various versions of the story how the big house came into the landlady's possession; but I have never yet been able to master the different points of the case. On the whole, I arrived at a conception of my landlady's character which was certainly very far from being altogether unfavourable. If she lied and stole, we must make allowance for that peculiar moral atmosphere in which landladies live; just as we make allowance for the peculiar atmosphere in which the old patriarchs lived. Undoubtedly she was a civil-spoken woman, and very hard worked; and her troubled expression of countenance confirmed the genuineness of the story of her troubles which she was so prone to relate.

It seemed, however, that she had a crowning trouble, which hitherto she had not related to us. One evening, with many scrapes and curtsies and stammerings, she astonished us very much by asking us if we would oblige her—the obligation would really be very great—by taking some supper with her and her daughter in her little room down stairs. She gave a marvellous reason for her request, by entering into a sad chapter of her family history. She was on very unfriendly terms with her husband. In fact, very few people knew that she had a husband. The house was her own and not her husband's, and the whole family support was derived from herself and not from her husband. The relations between the two were very ill understood, and I dare say have given rise to some cruel and very ill-deserved reflections. But the fact was, her husband was affected in his mind—a lunatic—occasionally a *raving, dangerous* lunatic. 'Where was he?' I inquired. Here she coloured and stammered; she had taken a little lodging for him close in the neighbourhood. She could not bear that he should be confined. Once or twice, indeed, he had been shut up, but then he had been so exceedingly bad that she had no option. At the present time he was not to

be considered dangerous, at least *not very dangerous*. He had sent her word that he was coming to supper that night. He was really a very pleasant, gentlemanly, well-informed man, she said, and might be a very interesting companion. Or, it was quite possible that it might be very much the reverse. If he did not come to supper, it would certainly be very much the reverse. His most dangerous hallucinations would revive. He was fully capable of raising a riot in front of the house in the public street, and of strangling two or three people before he could be effectually removed. She and her daughter were really afraid to meet him by themselves, and the friends on whom she generally relied were not on this occasion procurable. It would really be a charity and a kindness if Mr. Horatio Coeles and his lady would be so good as to come to her aid.

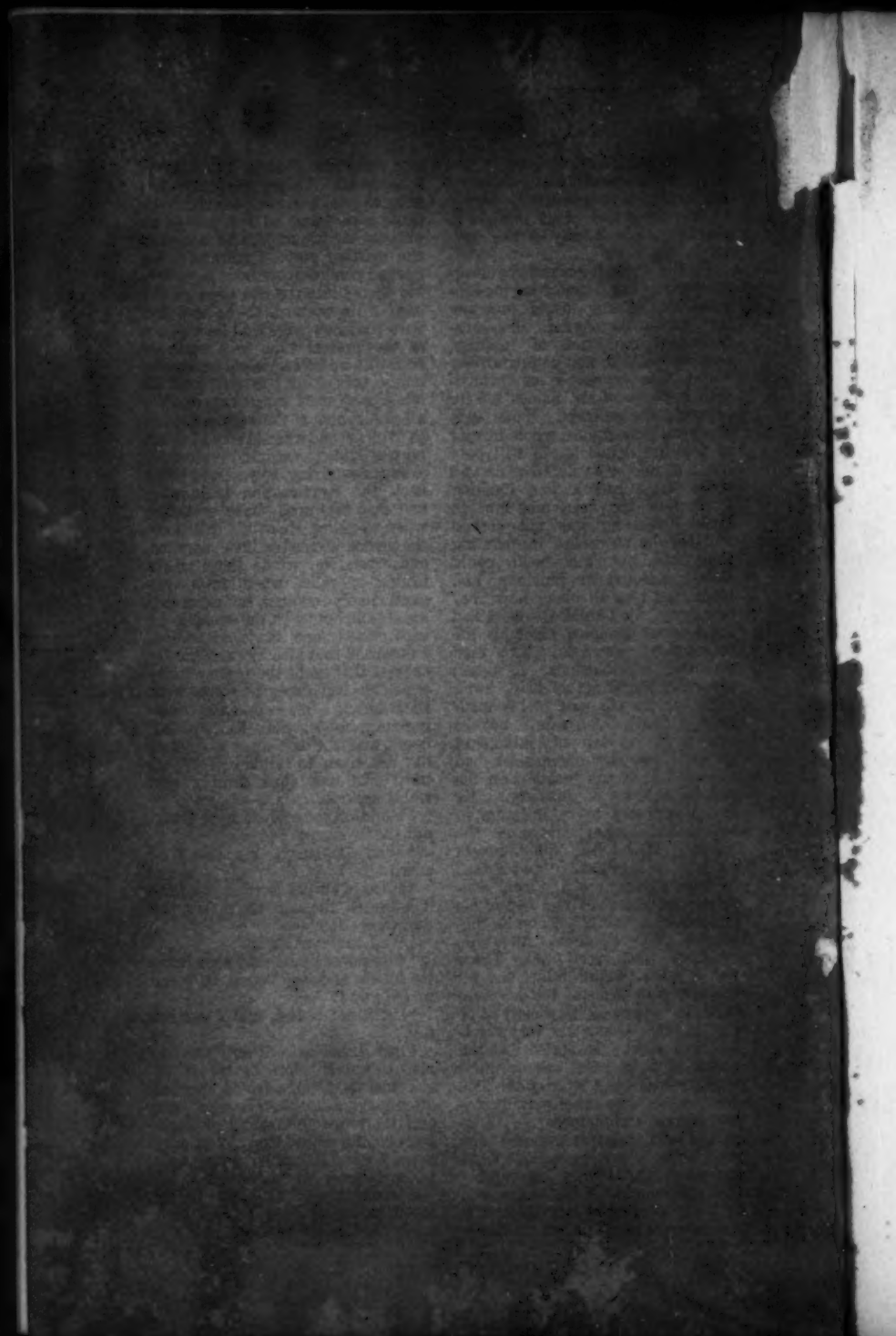
A thought of the heroism of my celebrated namesake determined me. Let me do my landlady the justice to say, that, having invited us to supper, she was fully prepared to carry out the idea in most illustrious fashion. A good deal of her loot and plunder would come back to me in the shape of the 'delicacies of the season.' We succeeded, however, in making her understand, that our dinner at half-past seven would render any meal at half-past eight a mere matter of outward form and ceremony. Nevertheless, there was a substantial supper provided, which made me regret that I was not in a position to do it justice. The landlady conversed with much gaiety, but she was only spasmodically gay. Suddenly a sharp tap came to the door. Then she retreated to the most distant corner of the room, evidently in abject terror. There was a similar movement on the part of the daughter. I observed that I myself acted as a kind of screen or barrier to the old lady, and Mrs. Horatio to the old lady's daughter. Some words of introduction were certainly said, for I recollect the sharp brisk bow, and the inquiring expression of eyes which, though certainly sharp and ferrety, gave no direct evidence



TICKLISH GROUND.

Drawn by G. de Massier.

[See "Furnished Apartments,"



of insanity. Nevertheless, it was not without concern that I observed the lunatic give a leisurely survey of the table, and plant himself in the immediate vicinity of the carving-knife.

On the whole, it was rather a cheerful party. For a time I led the conversation in my usual amusing and improving manner. The lunatic's first indication of insanity, though decided, was comparatively slight. He expressed an enthusiastic approval of Mr. Baines' bill for lowering the suffrage. Then suddenly we came upon a whole torrent of frightful delusions. I will only mention one or two. How he and some fiend had a long-standing feud; how the fiend met him in Hyde Park—he was not certain whether he succeeded in mauling the fiend, but the fiend could always succeed in pinching him black and blue all over; how 'he,' or 'Jerry,' for I think the fiend had some such cognomen, made his life thoroughly miserable. The man was full of delusions. A dozen criminals might get off being hung with the help of part of his madness, a part which would not be missed out of the superabundant mass. Singularly enough, we had a good deal of conversation on the general subject of insanity. My friend appeared to be fully up in the medical jurisprudence of the subject. If he had killed any of us, I think it might be shown that he was fully aware of the legal consequences of his act, and also of his chances of acquittal. Then he discoursed of mad-houses. As a rule he liked them very well. There was a good billiard table, and all the best periodicals of the day were taken in. Some of the society to be met in such places was very excellent and select. He stated that the nature of their cases was at times highly curious and interesting. The delusions in some cases were harmless, simple, and picturesque. As a rule, the treatment pursued was good, but it was, nevertheless, in several points of view, susceptible of improvement. I was anxious to find out whether he himself understood the nature of his own malady—

was conscious that he was himself a madman. This I was quite unable to discover. He seemed to be quite aware that he was treated as one out of his mind, and accepted the existing state of matters as his normal condition, without inquiring too nicely into the real state of the case. He seemed to be satisfied with the knowledge that he was not at the present time in a state of restraint, and that violent behaviour might subject him to that and to other unpleasant consequences. We all of us contrived the conversation so as to please and interest; and I think he was both pleased and interested, always contriving, however, to bring back the conversation to lunatics and mad asylums. Once or twice, when speaking about his delusions, the ladies seemed a little nervous, and upon the whole there was a feeling of relief, when, in a very gentlemanly manner, he expressed his satisfaction with the evening he had passed, and made his adieu. I observed that Mrs. Horatio hardly showed that night the magnanimity which she had displayed throughout the evening. She locked the drawing-room door, and the folding doors, and the bed-room door, and did not seem to think herself safe until she was thus doubly and trebly secured.

'Horatio,' she said, 'I have found out the mystery!'

'What mystery, my dear?' I asked.

'What a stupid Horatio you are! The breath, the arm, the noises, the footsteps, the crash.'

'Well, and what is it?'

'You never heard that poor lunatic knock and ring before he came in, did you?'

'I did not notice, and I cannot say.'

'But I noticed. There was no ring or knock before he tapped at the door and came in. I listened attentively, also, when he went out, and there was no opening or shutting of the front door. You may depend upon it that he never came in, and never went out. Now do you understand those back rooms which are kept so quiet and shut up? Our landlady does not like

the expense or exposure of shutting him up in an asylum, so she keeps him secretly here. At night, like an evil bird or beast, he is allowed to come forth, or somehow contrives to do so. The crash you heard was when he tried to enter the drawing-room, but found the door locked. The night I omitted to lock my own door, depend upon it he was actually in the room. Depend upon it, Horatio, we have escaped from a real peril.'

I believe Mrs. Horatio was perfectly right. I put this and that together, and also several other circumstances, with the repetition of which I have not thought it necessary to trouble the reader, and came to the same conclusion as she had. The disclosures which from time to time come before the public, show that persons of unsound mind from various motives are often kept confined or semi-confined in private houses, instead of being remitted to the safer care of public institutions. Furnished apartments are, in fact, public property, and any public property which any person can convert to his own use for an indefinite time, often inspires a disagreeable feeling of mystery and distrust. This makes Mrs. Horatio

long very much for her private brougham. I wish she may get it. Cabs, she argues, may be much cheaper and handier; the public coachman never shows that he is over-worked, or that the horses are ill; but the cabman may just have taken a fever patient to the hospital, and all other horrible things may have happened. So, too, the pretty drinking-fountains, which are of much greater practical use than the architecturally gorgeous fountains of Paris, although in London they seem rather too boastful of the beneficence of those who have presented them; you never know what kind of lip may have touched the drinking vessel just before your own. So, too, in furnished apartments. You are with people of whom you know nothing, and a house of which you know nothing. You may be robbed, beyond the common license of lodgings; or if there is a dangerous lunatic in the house, you may, as the Irishman said, awake up some fine morning and find your throat cut. Certainly, I never imagined, till this last experience, that there could be such mystery and romance in furnished apartments.

F. A.



ABOUT STEAMERS, SEA-SICKNESS, TRAINS, AND WALKING.



HAT a wonderful thing travelling is now-a-days! I am thinking this in a railway carriage which, in an hour, I hope will deposit me at Nice. Yesterday morning I breakfasted in London, and the evening before I dined in Scotland; so that I have travelled about twelve hundred miles in forty-eight hours—twenty-five miles an hour on an average. What would Dr. Johnson, who thought twelve miles an hour in a postchaise the height of human achievement, have said to this, if Mr. Boswell had dared to predict it to him? We can fancy the old sage rolling about in his arm-chair, and overwhelming his patient satellite by some such awful sentence as, 'Sir, you are a visionary block-head.'

The same wise man also defines a ship as a prison, with the risk of being drowned; but would he not have been induced to retract this severe judgment if he were a passenger for a month on board one of the P. and O. or Cunard steamers? Such vessels may indeed, in one sense, be prisons, but in another they are small towns provided with every luxury and comfort that space will permit. One ought to be happy on board such a vessel, with nothing to do, plenty of agreeable society and recreation, and yet very few people are. In the first place, such of the passengers as have been used to active life soon grow tired of idleness. One gets wearied of looking forward from breakfast to dinner, and yawning from dinner till tea. Dancing, private theatricals, and so forth, are resorted to, and then, for want of a better occupation, the passengers begin to quarrel with each other. Before long, perhaps, there are two rival parties of ladies in the ship, led by Mrs. White and Mrs. Black, who do all they can to enlist the men on their sides, and talk slander about the opposite party, and thus prevent time from hanging on their hands. Now is the time for Mrs. Jones to throw discredit on Miss Green's account of her birth and parentage; and for Mr. Fitzaburn to whisper darkly that he has reason to believe that Mr. Jenkins has made his money as a tailor; or for old Miss Good-girl to hold up her hands and wonder that Mrs. Brown has not the decency to take notice of the way in which young Jackson is going on with her daughter Clementina. It is a humbling fact for human nature that people cannot be boxed up together for any length of time without jarring and wrangling and slandering thus, especially when, as in this case, sea air produces appetite, which produces overeating, and that again, in conjunction with want of exercise, produces biliousness.

Sometimes, instead of quarrelling, this biliousness takes the form of grumbling. Grumbling in general and grumbling in particular; grumbling about the weather, grumbling about the mutton, grumbling against the captain. This last form of grumbling must, however, be very sparingly indulged in; for a captain is an autocrat on board his own ship, and won't stand any nonsense. No sucking Washington dare suggest republicanism or even limited monarchy on the high seas, for where all depends upon one

man, he must be invested with despotic power. Perhaps it is not generally known that a captain can put an unruly passenger in irons, and that such a thing has happened before now; so take care, gentlemen, and you, Mrs. White, beware, for you are travelling without your husband, and depend upon it the captain's watchful eye is upon young Fitzburn to see that he does not pay you more attention than is necessary. It is to be hoped that he will not remind passengers of the power which he has over them; but some skippers are terrible rulers of their men: I know one who condemned his cook to drink straightway two gallons of execrable coffee which he had concocted, but being a tender-hearted man, he remitted the punishment at the end of half a gallon.

To leave the leviathans of navigation—did any reader ever take a sail about the Mediterranean in a coasting steamer? There are several drawbacks to the enjoyment of such a trip. In the first place, these steamers are generally crowded, and the traveller is born under a lucky star if he does not find the deck littered with soldiers, like pigs; while the officers, each with a suite of wife, babies, and lapdogs, block up the cabin. In the second place, unless they carry a mail, it is the exception rather than the rule for such steamers to start within several hours of the appointed time. I have known one delay twenty-four hours before starting on a voyage which was to occupy nine or ten at most, but which actually occupied two days and two nights in all. The least puff of wind, or a dark night, is quite enough excuse to prevent a French or Italian steamer putting to sea; and I have known a trainful of passengers, who had come by train from Florence to Leghorn, *en route* for Genoa, turn back in dismay at what we should have thought a very ordinary breeze, at my indifference to which, every one, especially the landlord of my hotel, was amazed. The third drawback is that, as we know from the poets, the Mediterranean is a calm, lake-like sea, except on some three hun-

dred and sixty days out of the three hundred and sixty five, when it has a monotonous swell, which might serve as a purgatory for bilious persons; and a ship full of seasick foreigners is not a pleasant place. But if you do not mind these drawbacks, it is a pleasant thing to lie on the poop-deck beneath an awning and lazily watch the white smoke of your cigar curl up against the deep blue of the sea and the brighter blue of the sky; or as you slip along them to scan through your glass the lovely shores of the Bay of Naples, or the varied scenery of the Corniche road winding round rocky gulfs and up steep hills; or last, but not least in beauty and interest, catching just such glimpses of the purple hills and picturesque glens of Spain as makes one long to land and explore them. And after dusk, when the sun has set in a glory of mingled colours, to watch from the stern the white water sparkling and fizzing in our wake, and to see the bright stars come out and shine down on the dark sea, till their light is quenched in the silver splendour of a southern moon. Then comes a solemn sense of solitude on the soul, that wakes amid sleeping men, and dreams of past, present, and future, and knows that here there is but one thin plank betwixt earthly life and the awful mysteries of death, and feels the nearness of God's equal power and love. This is happiness and peace.

Let us turn in fancy to a very different extreme. You, O luxurious landsman! are on board a cranky brig that is tumbling about in the Bay of Biscay. The wind and rain drive you from the slippery deck to the close and stinking cabin, where you crawl into your narrow berth, sick and disgusted and weary of life; and then for long hours you are bumped about and tormented ceaselessly by sound, smell, and sickness. And yet in all this misery a true, healthy English mind will find some consolation—a certain satisfaction in the feeling that something is being endured, and in the hope and anticipated joy of arriving at Gibraltar or Cadiz, and once

more setting foot on terra firma, and knowing the bliss of a sound stomach. Observe, that the seasick voyager looks for no sooner termination to his woes than arrival at land: he is too utterly prostrate

to hope for recovery and happiness upon the waves. But enough about steamboats and sea-sickness; since we have come to land, let us begin to talk about railways.

In railway matters we English



are woefully behindhand, the only points in which our lines excel being speed and accidents—and, by-the-by, high fares. For these qualities they are favourably known throughout other countries—or unfavourably perhaps, as opinions go—as also for the meagreness and discomfort of their accommodation. However, my conscience is reminding me that it is a shame to attribute to the public what is perhaps only due to the stinginess of directors. Besides, I have lately travelled a good deal on English railways, and so of course my feelings are prejudiced against them. Therefore, I will say no more about them for the present, further than to remind directors that it is never too late—nor too early—to mend.

In America, railway accommodation is more perfect, although there, too, it has its irritations and dangers. The cars so arranged that the travellers can pass from one to another, or take exercise in small galleries running round the outside of each, whilst refreshments and so forth may generally be had—

I was going to say on board; and there are even such luxuries as sleeping-berths, dressing-closets, &c. The cars, however, are not divided into compartments, and are open to all classes, except the everlasting nigger, at equal fares; so that here John Bull, Esq., would find some difficulty in securing the privacy and seclusion which are as dear to him as his National Debt and Habeas Corpus Act. There is another more serious drawback in the eyes of my countrymen. The go-ahead principle on which American affairs are conducted not according with the sober, steady fashion in which railways should be conducted, frequent smashes and blowings-up are the natural result, and lend to this kind of travelling a sort of excitement which may be very agreeable to those who like it, as an Irishman would say; but for my part I should prefer to ride on a hard wooden bench, than on a cushioned sofa, if I had any idea that the latter was likely at any moment to double up upon my mangled body.

On French railways the accom-

moderation is much the same as on our own, though the lines are worked in a more cautious manner. The French system of government has been called fraternal, but, to my mind, it savours more of the nursery. So in the management of their railways. The French when travelling, as in other aspects of life, are treated like a nation of naughty babies, who must be told exactly what to do and where to go. Perhaps this plan is best for the traveller in the end, but Mr. Bull is not well pleased at being treated as if he could not take care of himself. But he must do at Paris as Paris does, or the police will know why. Important-looking

station-masters and other bearded officials scowl at him if he ventures to disobey any of the rules, and drive him like a sheep into the proper pen, where he has to wait for his train. Arrived at the station, you are cross-examined as to your destination. Then your luggage is seized and borne away. Then you have to get your ticket at a barred wicked, guarded, perhaps, by a gendarme. Then you have to go after your luggage, have it weighed and stamped, give in your ticket to a small office, whose occupant tells you what to pay, and gives you back your ticket, and along with it another bearing a number corresponding to one which has been



fixed on the baggage, without the production of which it will not be delivered up at the journey's end. Then you are conducted to one of three pens for first, second, and third class passengers, where you are confined till the train is made up. The first-class pen is opened first, and the animals contained in it having been duly seated, the second-class herd is let loose, and lastly, the third. But I will do French politeness the justice to say that I believe that the humblest third-class passenger has as much chance of receiving attention as any

one else. Is it so in England? French politeness is indeed wonderful, when it is not superseded by French official dignity, which is something terrible. In my short lifetime I have been granted interviews with two or three French station-masters, and came away with a great sense of their grandeur and my own unworthiness. On the first such occasion, being nervous about my French, I took an interpreter with me, who was so awed by the majesty of the official that he would scarcely open his mouth. On the second, I bearded-one in his den at

Marseilles, and, after much difficulty, got what I wanted. On the third, I was rather coolly treated at the Paris station of the Chemin du Fer du Nord. But a friend procured for me an all-powerful letter from Baron Rothschild, the president of the railway, and returning with this firman next day, I was able in turn to look down upon my friend the *chef de gare*, who at once became remarkably obliging.

The carriages are the same as the English, but the first-class ones have always *coupés*, which are regarded as *places de luxe*, and the occupants of which have to pay about ten per cent. in addition to the ordinary first-class fare. They are very stingy about the number of carriages allowed to each train, so that they are nearly always crowded.

The journey is performed with official decorum, frequent stops being made for refreshment at the stations where there is a *buffet*. Who was it who started the calumny that the English were a nation pre-eminently given to eating? The French are far more so. They eat at all hours and in all places. Waiters come to the trains with ices and cakes. Travellers provide themselves with pieces of sausage in paper to eat on the way. I recollect a sumptuous breakfast being laid out at Lyons at five in the morning, at which the majority of the passengers rushed off to gobble, although they had only a few minutes. But I must say that the best foreign dinner and the cheapest—three francs and a half, I think—I ever had was at the Lyons railway station, three quarters of an hour being allowed for it. What are our miserable twenty minutes at Preston or ten minutes at Swindon, compared to this?

German railroads are slow and comfortable. At every station there is a long pause, during which the passengers turn out on the platform, smoke, and talk metaphysics. The first-class carriages are especially luxurious, but, concerning them, I have an anecdote which I do not believe has ever before been printed. A certain sovereign duke, it is said, having been deposed in 1848, and

hastening away from his dominions, was asked if he would go first-class. 'Certainly not,' said he, 'none but idiots, Englishmen, and princes do, and now I am none of these.' This may be to a certain extent true in Germany, but in France and Italy the first-class is extensively used, and indeed the French quick trains are often exclusively composed of first-class carriages.

In Germany a prolific source of annoyance meets the traveller, which, as regards Englishmen at least, is in France legally, and in the kingdom of Italy practically inoperative,—I mean the passport system, which merely annoys honest men without giving protection to rogues. I have heard of a gentleman who was hastening to the funeral of a near relative, stopped at the frontiers of Prussia, and sent back to Brussels to correct some trifling inaccuracy in his passport. Such cases are probably of too common occurrence.

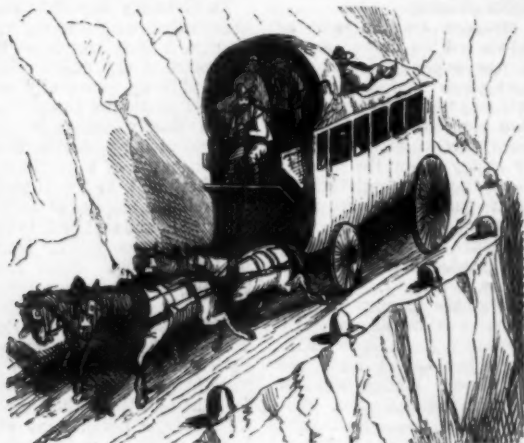
In Italy railway proceedings are characterised by extreme deliberation. First the passengers saunter up leisurely and take their tickets some half an hour before the time for starting. When they have taken their seats, a performance of bells, horns, whistles, and howls takes place, and the train moves slowly off. At every station there is a long stop, and a conversation, perhaps, between the engine-driver and the station-master upon the local news. Then off we go again in a dignified manner. Nothing ever seems to be done in that agony of haste which you may see at home. But I remember rather a cool thing which was done at the Leghorn station. Outside of the station is a courtyard, the gates of which are shut five minutes before the departure of the train. I drove hurriedly up to catch the train, and began to have my luggage carried into this courtyard. But when one half was in, the official, who had silently watched the proceeding, announced that time was up, and shut the gate upon me and the rest of my baggage, so that I lost the train. Here, indeed, *was* punctuality.

I had been told so much about the comfort of Italian railway car-

riages, that I was quite surprised to find them no better than our own, and bearing the same inscription, 'Metropolitan Waggon Co. (Limited)'. This was at Pisa. But on the railway between Naples and Castellamare the first-class carriages are the finest I have ever seen.

Talking about Italy, how many of my readers shall I cause to groan

when I mention a diligence? We seem to see at once a huge nondescript machine, half stage-coach, half omnibus, half cab. Fancy a string of mules or lean horses, with woefully shabby and patched harness. Fancy a crowd of boys looking on, a cracking of the driver's whip, a lighting of his cigar, and then a horrible creaking and strain-



ing, then you have the start. Fancy also some hours of crawling and jolting, and you have its progress. Imagine stiffness, weariness, and the intense delight of ended toil, and you may have some faint idea of the pleasure of your arrival. But perhaps I am too hard on the poor old diligences. When you have only a short journey to make, and the day is fine, it is not a bad thing to sit in the *banquette*, and from that elevated position survey the country. The *banquette* is a seat immediately behind the driver, roofed in, but open to the front, a stout leather apron covering your legs; and when once you have climbed up, it is rather comfortable, unless your legs are long. Below is the *coupe*, shut in with glass, for which the fare is higher, and which is therefore, of course, affected by English tourists. Behind this is the *intérieur*, like the inside of a

stage-coach; and most diligences have behind this a compartment opening to the back, like a section of an omnibus. On the top, under a waterproof covering, are the luggage and the poorest class of passengers, who lie huddled there like swine.

If you have a large party, or wish to be exclusive, you may travel by *vetturino*, a large roomy carriage, holding eight or nine persons, besides luggage. For a party these will generally be found to be no more expensive than travelling by diligences, though the sums given vary according to the demand, and your sharpness in bargaining with the proprietor. For instance, at the beginning of the winter a *vetturino* to go south would cost much more than the same vehicle for the return journey north. But you would have the disadvantage of going much slower than the diligence, unless

you went to the expense of having relays of fresh horses—that is, in long journeys. In short journeys, among hilly country, the lighter weight of the smaller carriage of course gives it an advantage. The lumbering diligences have often to go at a walking pace for miles over the hills. I recollect, while I was going by diligence from Ventimiglia to Mentone, that one passenger jumped off and walked on, informing the driver that he would pick him up ahead. We never saw him again; so next time, when making the same journey, I tried the experiment of walking all the way, and having had a very slight start, beat the diligence into Mentone by ten minutes or so.

This brings me to the useful and yet despised manner of travelling—that familiar biped 'Shanks, his mare.' Believe me, this is by far the pleasantest way of travelling. The public must take my word for it, as I am a convert from a still greater laziness than enthrals the majority of my countrymen. Once I could not walk ten miles without being knocked up, and disliked all such exercise; but, acting on the advice of judicious friends, I practised, and grew gradually stronger and more persevering, till I could do at least thirty miles without inconvenience—more than that would hurt the average of men. I can now say that I have spent some of the happiest hours of life in walking—through the Highlands of Scotland, the moors of Devon, the

bare steep paths of the Alps, the lemon and olive groves of the Riviera, the rich fields and gardens of Campania, and last, not least, the quiet lanes and shady meadows that are the familiar charm of England. Some day I hope to walk through Switzerland in a quiet sober way, without risking my valuable life on any precipices or glaciers. I don't grudge the Alpine Club their reputation, nor do I envy it. And to me, as to many other hearts, there is this year a shadow on those snowy masses. Once I had a friend, fair-haired, blue-eyed, wise and strong—one of thousands such that are the pride of Britain, and the admiration of foreign lands—brave, too, and, alas! too brave. I remember him as the companion of what I think were the pleasantest hours of travel I ever had in my life; and I remember my last meeting with him in a foreign town—ay, and last parting too, and last shake of his hand; for scarcely had the press ended telling of the well-won distinction that opened out to him a splendid path of honour and usefulness, than the telegram followed swiftly announcing that his mangled body was lying at the foot of the mountain which he had just successfully ascended. His friends will know of whom I write, and will know, too, the sorrow which is shared with his noble house by those who knew his active foot and his cheerful eye, ere that fatal slide down the gloomy slope of the Matterhorn.

J. H. M.



A SHORT NOVICIATE IN THE THESPIAN ART.



IN vain they argued, father, mother, sister, brother; in vain from morning till night they dunned into my ears the complicated evils of a theatrical career. The spell was upon me, the fascination of the foot-lights held me with a charm too potent for resistance—I was—let me see—yes, that's the term for it—I was stage-struck.

The younger son of a baronet, but heir to neither his title nor his estate, it was necessary that I should become the architect of my own fortunes. I rejected with contumely

the career of a barrister mapped out for me by my father. I would become an actor; or, if thwarted, would cast myself headlong into the care-expelling lethean waters of the Serpentine.

Thus urged, my father applied to an actor of the Theatre Royal —, between whom and himself there had been of late some business transaction. What transpired I know not. Suffice it that a few days subsequently the actor appeared with a broad grin on his face, and made the announcement that he

had procured for me an engagement at the little Theatre P—, in Shropshire. Could that honoured disciple of the immortal Thespis have witnessed the gleam of ecstatic happiness that irradiated my bosom as the result of that single piece of intelligence, he would have sought his pillow that night with the assurance that he had performed an action, the magnanimity of which would compensate for all the errors, great and small, committed by him within the term of his natural existence.

I pass over, in as few words as possible, these necessary preliminary details; and humour the impatience of my reader by coming at once, as Hamlet says, in characteristic phraseology 'to Hecuba.'

I arrived late at night at the little town of P—, Shropshire. The next morning I proceeded early to the theatre, having been summoned to attend a rehearsal, arranged for ten o'clock punctually, of Shakespeare's world-renowned tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. With some difficulty I found my way to the stage-door, and thence through a mystifying labyrinth of passages on to the stage itself. Here I was met by the stage-manager, a very pompous individual, with a remarkably red nose and shiny countenance, who presented me severally to the members of the company, eyeing me, as he did so, with a look of condescension perfectly appalling; and who wound up his brief introductory formula with the following meritorious appeal to his coadjutors and brethren in the art.

'A novice, ladies and gentlemen, a perfect novice; a defect time will rectify. Treat him leniently, my children, treat him leniently. We were all novices once, you know; yes, all novices once—upon a time.' The last words were almost lost in a sharp, shrill, prolonged whistle, which was immediately taken up by the male members of the company, and responded to by a low, stifled tittering amongst those of the opposite gender. 'Clear the stage!' shouted the stage-manager, throwing himself across a three-legged stool that stood facing the centre

footlight. 'Clear the stage, ladies and gentlemen. Off at wing, sir, off at wing!' turning on me a wrathful, injured countenance. 'Is the man deaf or contumacious? Fine him, sir, fine him'—turning to a quaint, spare-looking individual at his elbow, and who, I afterwards ascertained, fulfilled the office of prompter in ordinary to the company—'fine him one shilling and sixpence for contempt of green-room regulations.'

'Clear the stage! off at wing!' terms of mysterious import. I began to get bewildered. While I was speculating upon the probable exposition of those ambiguous phrases, a rude gripe was fastened on my throat, and I found myself ejected, by an unpleasantly summary process, from the centre of the stage into one of the narrow recesses of the side-scenes. 'Enter Romeo' was shouted from the vicinity of the three-legged stool that stood facing the centre footlight. 'Not that entrance, sir,' as I made a dart from the recess in which I was standing on to the middle of the stage. 'Door-flat, sir, door-flat. 'Sdeath, how the fellow stares! Sharpen your wits, sir, sharpen your wits. Can't stand here all day teaching you your business. Enter Romeo. Door-flat. Sharp's the word, sir, sharp's the word. The Lord help us!—these novices!' This was said in an effective stage-aside. 'Here,' shouted the stage-manager at the top of his stentorian lungs, 'will any member of the company make short work of this gentleman through the entrance door-flat?'

The same hand that had before so unceremoniously gripped my throat, now seized me by the collar of the coat, and with a sudden energetic swing impelled me forwards through a door inserted in a set chamber scene, which occupied the whole breadth of the stage between the two extremities of right and left.

'Mind the flies, sir; mind the flies!' was next ejaculated from the vicinity of the stool, before I had time to recover the equilibrium of my thoughts, 'mind the flies! That scene a little firmer in the grooves,'

aside to the master carpenter.' 'Mind the flies, you idiot!'

I snatched my kerchief from my pocket, and began wafting it backwards and forwards in the air as a precaution against the too close inroad of these troublesome companions against which the august stage-manager had uttered a prophetic warning. 'Confound the fellow!' roared the presiding genius of the place, stamping his foot with infuriate energy, 'if some of you don't eject him from his position he'll be murdered.' As he spoke, a huge mass of mountain scenery, impelled by an unseen hand from some mysterious region of the upper grooves, fell with a terrific crash upon the stage, not a couple of paces from where I stood in blissful ignorance of the impending danger. A general buzz and exclamation; and then, my personal safety ascertained, all again subsided into the routine of order.

'Take the stage, sir; take the stage!' was the imperious mandate which now assailed my ears, and which threatened to subvert the little power of reasoning still left within the region of my obfuscated intellects. 'Take the stage, sir. Life and death, man, can't you hear? take the st—-a—-ge;' the inflection of the voice rising on the last syllable, till the word was lost in one sharp, prolonged, excruciating scream.

I was petrified, dumbfounded with astonishment. Here stood I, a gallant emulor of the immortal Thespis, and there stood he, the veritable stage-manager, coolly uttering his directions to 'take the stage.' What did he mean? Did he intend that I should raise the floor from its base and bear it on my shoulders? Had that Herculean feat come within the range of human capability, I should have felt strangely tempted to hurl the offending article at the semi-devoted head of the illustrious stage-manager thus issuing his instructions. As it was, I simply stood and stared, receiving, as a reward of my inability to proceed, a number of ejaculatory epithets from the lips of the pompous individual enthroned upon the stool.

'Taking the stage, means simply crossing it,' broke in the little cracked voice of the prompter, humanely anxious to relieve me from the perplexity of my unpleasant situation.

'You're a muff, sir,' growled the stage-manager, as, the rehearsal over, I feebly inquired of him the way to the stage-door.

The night came, the night of nights, on which a young gentleman was about to make his first appearance on any stage in the world, in the renowned character of Romeo. My entrance was greeted with a round of applause from half a dozen little urchins in the gallery, who, at the opening of the piece, were reckoned up as the sum-total of the audience. As the play progressed, two or three ill-looking stragglers found their way into the pit, who, together with a solitary individual in the boxes, composed during the evening the principal spectators of Shakespeare's highly-wrought and touching tragedy. By degrees I worked up into the spirit of the part; and towards the conclusion of the third act became so startlingly energetic, as to elicit the marked astonishment of the individual in the boxes, and the vociferated 'bra—-a—-voes' of the little grinning-faced urchins in the gallery above. I began to gain immensely in my own estimation, and was moving about the stage with an air of importance, bewildering to the company, when an incident occurred which brought to a close my career of proud assumption, and reduced me to a more natural level.

The celebrated 'sleeping scene,' where Juliet imbibes the potion prepared for her by the Friar, was about to be enacted, when the fair impersonator of the love-sick heroine suddenly discovered that she had not in her possession the customary stage-property essential to the situation. Walking to the side-scene with a look of consternation on her face, she exclaimed *sotto voce*, 'A phial with poison in it. Quick, hasten!' Away I scampered, forcing a passage through the heavy, tangled scenery, overturning in my headlong course the little musty

call-boy, and two or three white-frocked individuals who were engaged in arranging the 'sets,' until I alighted full-breathed in the property-room, which stood facing the grooves of the right second entrance. Here my olfactory nerves were assailed by an odour at once novel and alarming, composed, as it was, of many kinds of scents, such as green and red paint, turpentine, glue steaming from a large ogre-looking saucepan, orange-peel, stage-shavings, lamp-oil, the worse for keeping, rank paste, whitewash, and what not that's abominable? Staring round the place with a look of mystified inquiry, I spied on a small shelf on the right hand side, a small bottle full of a staring liquid, and labelled in large, startling letters with the word 'POISON.' Snatching it from its dormitory, I darted with it to the left upper entrance, and pushed it unresistingly into the hand of the perplexed and watchful Juliet. The scene proceeded, and in due course the phial was raised to the trembling lips, and its contents poured deliberately down the throat of the despairing damsel. But lo! the catastrophe. A broad stream of glowing lava, partaking the semblance of blood, was suddenly ejected from the mouth of the ill-starred fair one, sullyng in its downward progress the snowy whiteness of her vestal garment. There was a general rush and exclamation behind the scenes, while on all sides I found myself assailed with the oft-repeated inquiry, 'What is it? what have you given her? Fool, dolt, madman! what was in the bottle?' 'Poison!' I ejaculated, throwing up my arms with a gesture of unfeigned horrified flammergastion. 'Poison!' exclaimed the united voices of the company, turning on me their blank, awe-stricken countenances. 'Paricide, fratricide, regicide, assassin, murderer!'

'Good heavens! good heavens!' exclaimed the luckless Juliet, rushing off the stage, and throwing herself into the arms of her nearest male companion, 'I'm killed, assassinated, cut off in my virgin blossom! The bottle was labelled poison.'

O—o—o—oh! I'm a dead woman!'

'What's up now?' said the gruff voice of the property-man, who had made his way round from the opposite side of the stage to discover the cause of disturbance. 'What's the row, my hearties; what's the row?'

'The bottle—labelled—poison,' stammered Juliet, pointing with her fingers to the empty phial that lay discarded on the stage.

'Oh! that's it, is it?' said the property-man, coolly taking up the phial, and conveying it to his waistcoat pocket. 'Well, it did contain laudanum yesterday, but I emptied it this morning, and refilled it with—'

'What?' exclaimed a dozen voices, speaking in a buzz.

'RED INK.'

My troubles, however, were not concluded for the evening. A mishap occurred which brought our play to a premature conclusion, and left me in a position, the multiplied perplexities of which I leave to the imagination of the reader. The carpenters were arranging the paraphernalia for the last scene; it was the tomb of the Capulets; a faded piece of scenery, looking very unlike a vault, and presenting a quaint semblance to the interior of an Indian hut, had been forerretted out from some hole or corner for the outer partition. This was considered an excellent substitute for the *bonâ fide* article, especially as it contained two folding-doors in the centre, which would serve as a convenient entrance to the gloomy catacomb. This ponderous contrivance, for lack of proper stage appliances, was rested against the shoulders of two stalwart carpenters, who thus sustained it in fluttering equilibrium, and were themselves unseen by the prying eyes of the curious spectators in the front. A plank was then produced from some mysterious region, on which the youthful Juliet was to lie surrounded by all the trappings of funeral pomp. The bier thus providently supplied, a difficulty arose as to the precise manner in which the said plank should be transferred

to a distance several paces from the ground. Here, as before, the absence of stage appliances rendered the obstacle of a formidable nature. In this dilemma, an unexpected champion, in the person of a scene-shifter, appeared to the gallant rescue. This disinterested member of the scene-shifting fraternity at once proposed to bear on his own unaided shoulders the weight of the two-fold burden, *i.e.*, the plank and its precious freight. The offer was accepted. The man adjusted himself on all-fours upon the ground, and received as the reward of his good-humoured interposition the weight of the heavy wooden board athwart his back. A sheet was then thrown across the uplifted plank to conceal from the audience the person of the bier-bearer crouched beneath. Finally, Juliet herself was hoisted to the top of this eccentric-looking pile, care being taken that the weight of her body should fall towards the centre, since any undue preponderance to the sides would cause the whole ingeniously-constructed fabric to topple to the ground. The scene commenced. For the last time that memorable night I made my appearance before the audience in the character of the love-sick Montague. I received from Balthasar the heavy-looking crowbar with which I was supposed, at a given cue, to break open the tomb of the noble Capulets.

'Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,
Thus I enforce thy iron jaws to open.'

Scarcely had I uttered the last line, when with a sudden action of the hand, I lifted the heavy crowbar from the ground, and let it fall with a tremendous crash against the opening of the brittle tenement. Smash went the whole slender paraphernalia, its weight dragging to the ground the fair and weeping Juliet, clinging desperately to the neck of her gallant bier-bearer, who, in his attempt to disentangle his person, fell rolling with his lovely burden down to the region of the glaring footlights. To complete the finale, one of the carpenters engaged in supporting the frail erection, finding himself about to be

buried in its *débris*, made a sudden clutch at the opening of my vest, and overpowering me with the weight of his stalwart person, we both fell toppling on the heels of our lowly-lodged *confreeres*. In this position we remained stunned and inactive, listening to the roars and hootings of the audience.

'Will nobody rise from the ground and pick me up?' murmured Juliet, her fair person irradiated by the gleam of the glittering footlights, 'will nobody rise and pick me up? I shall be burnt to a cinder beneath these flaming gas-lights. Oh my, what a pickle, to be sure! Will nobody rise from the ground and pick me up?'

'Get up, you jack-a-napes!' roared the voice of the stage-manager, speaking off the wing. 'Get up, you muff, and lead her off. Drop the curtain,' to the mysterious individual in the flies. 'Oh, I'll pay you off for this, young cockcomb!' shaking his fist threateningly at me, as, accompanied by the grinning carpenters, I led the fair and trembling Juliet from the scene.

The next night we were to play 'Pizarro.' A great 'star' from the Lilliput Theatre, London, was engaged to appear in the leading character. This illustrious individual made his appearance at the morning's rehearsal, and turned the whole of our little *corps dramatique* to the speedy right-about. The extolled metropolitan tragedian refused to go on for the part of 'Rolla,' assisted by the mean accessories of the stage. The provincial stage-manager bowed and scraped to the great London actor, and the great London actor turned up his nose in pitiful disdain of the provincial stage-manager. Then ensued a scene of confusion, during which the star from the metropolis went through a series of stampings and ravings, which always resulted in the said London prodigy being forced to give way to country expedients. I was unluckily cast for the part of 'Pizarro,' and accordingly came in for the larger share of the great man's vituperation. If there ever was born within the range of her Majesty's dominions

a real live human jackass, in the great man's estimation, I at once became identified with that grotesque animal. If he instructed me in a thing one way I had an idiotically perverse habit of doing it the reverse; I presented my right arm when I should have extended my left; I stared up persistently at the flies when I should have drooped my eyelids musingly upon the ground; I started back in horrified amazement when I should have darted forward in pursuit with a gesture of phrenzied hatred; I was, in short, what the great man on this occasion openly asserted me to be—a veritable jackass.

It was soon discovered that the Fates were unpropitious to the advent of this great metropolitan star in the midst of a country firmament. The attendance in the evening was meagre and undemonstrative, which did not improve the temper of the said disciple of Melpomene. The play commenced, and the 'gun' of the night appeared fully equipped before the footlights without receiving any special recognition from the audience. Our tragedian's constitutional irritability here began to show itself. Everything that everybody did was every possible anything but the veritable right thing. The actors didn't know their parts, the scene-shifters blundered in the sets, the young men were stigmatized as 'novices' the old men as 'fools,' and the whole fraternity of Thespians wantonly traduced as a brotherhood of incorrigible 'muffs.' And so the great man fretted through his part, rendering himself as unpopular with the audience in front as with the members of the *corps dramatique* assembled in the green-room. The first act was over, the musicians did their part, and the curtain rang blithely up for the second tableau. The imported London Rolla, rewarded for his exertions by a few scattered plaudits from the audience, recovered his good-humour, and soon worked grandly up into the spirit of the part. It was the scene in the temple between Ataliba, Rolla, and Alonzo. The ingenuous Rolla, stationed in the centre of the stage,

delivered with carefully-studied emphasis his famous patriotic appeal to the warriors of Peru. Endowed with sudden inspiration, he uttered with increasing force the passage, 'The throne we honour is the people's choice—the laws we reverence are our brave fathers' legacy—the faith we follow teaches us, &c.' When lo! from the mysterious region of the flies, was heard, as if in answer to his address, a low gurgling sound, proceeding leisurely at first, but gaining, as it neared the centre roofing, a startling accession of velocity and power. All eyes were at once directed to the flies. But the London Thespian, too superb an individual to pay regard to trivial occurrences, proceeded with his grandiloquent tirade, heedless of the ominous stormcloud gathering overhead. Then came the crisis. The gurgling sound increased in volume till it resembled the roar of rushing waters; and then, unloosed from some mysterious flood-gate in the roof, there descended on the stage a complete cataract of living water, rudely christening in its fall the upturned faces of the warriors, and enveloping in a novel constitutional shower-bath the person of the great Peruvian patriot.

'By all the guardian saints above us!' exclaimed the gallant Rolla, darting away from underneath the rain-cloud; 'Thunder and lightning, and all deadly furies! why what is the meaning of that?'

'It's the tank, sir,' whispered a super standing against the great man's elbow; 'I know'd it would be so in the morning.'

'The tank! what tank?' said the mystified tragedian.

'The water-tank, sir, inserted in the roof in case of haccidents by fire. It's very inconvenient; but—'

'What?'

'It's bust, sir.'

'Bust?'

'Yes, bust, or busted, if that's the righter term. It's because the manager wouldn't pay to have it mended. It's busted, sir, and them's the contents o' the creature's biler.'

The tragedian ground his teeth. He rushed up and down the stage,

jerked out the syllables of the text, and filling up his short elocutionary pauses with indignant, savage ejaculations against the penurious folly of the management. Bringing the scene to a premature conclusion, the wet-garmented Rolla rushed to the side of the awe-stricken prompter, and relieved the agony of his pent-up fury by expending on that individual the full torrent of his virtuous indignation.

'May your tinpot theatre rot, with its twopenny-halfpenny tag-rag finery!' was the parting benison of the enraged Thespian, as he strode away to his dressing-room to make some necessary change in his saturated garments. 'If that individual doesn't look out,' remarked some facetious member of the company, 'he'll follow the example of the tank; and bottling his ire within the narrow medium of his heart-strings, go off some day in a fit of spontaneous combustion.'

And verily this night the Fates seemed arrayed in conspiracy against the peace of the illustrious tragedian. In one of his most effective scenes, the gas-lights in the arena became suddenly extinguished, involving the whole theatre in total darkness. This deficiency supplied, all jogged along with tolerable smoothness till we arrived at the commencement of the fifth act. Here, however, we received an unexpected check in the shape of a new disaster. The little girl who had hitherto sustained the part of Cora's child in the tragedy was taken unceremoniously ill with the cramp, and borne by its alarmed and doting mother from the vicinity of the theatre. Here was a dilemma! Rolla's great 'sensation' scene, where he snatches the child from its captors, and leaps with it triumphantly over the vacuum of the fallen bridge, was about to be enacted. Where to find a substitute for the absconded infant became a matter of grave and serious consideration. Upon this unpromising aspect of affairs, I came forward, and proposed what I considered at the time an ingenious expedient. I had noticed, parading about the side-scenes, performing the offices of

master-carpenter, a little eccentric man-dwarf, who, though arrived at the years of full-blown maturity, was so exceedingly diminutive as not to reach up to the point of a grown man's elbow. I at once suggested that this interesting specimen of the dwarf-species should be arrayed in becoming and appropriate costume, and sent on for the nonce, to fill up the remaining situations of the vacated part. My proposition was accepted, and arrangements were made for carrying into speedy execution this admirable scheme.

The little old man, duly equipped and instructed, was borne in the arms of the gallant Rolla, who, unconscious of the grim, weird nature of his burden, sprang with him across the opening of the bridge; bore him along to the grooves of the right first entrance; rushed upon the stage, and dashed him exultingly into the arms of the expectant Cora. The overjoyed mother, following the received traditions of the part, snatched to her bosom the supposed rosy-faced cherub, strained it to her heart, and finally wound up the effective situation by pressing to its lips a succession of passionate caresses. The mouth of the dwarf-man still retained the impression of the last lingering kiss, when the eyes of Cora were suddenly transfixed by the mischievous, distorted grimace on the elf-creature's features. Starting back in amazement, she uttered, as the hideous truth forced itself upon her understanding, one long, piercing shriek of horror and aversion; and, flinging the loathsome burden into the middle of the orchestra, rushed dimayed and terror-stricken from the footlights.

'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' exclaimed the virtuous Cora, throwing herself on a form in the green room, and jerking out her words in a series of fitful, hysterical sobs. 'Oh, dear! what will become of me? Ugh! the nasty creature?' shaking violently. 'Oh, I'm a gone woman! Who has played this horrible joke? To think I should be kissing and caressing what I fondly imagined to be a darling cherry-lipped seraph; and all the while I was hugging to my

bosom a little ugly old man, sixty years old and upwards! O—o—oh!

'Who has done this?' exclaimed the enraged stage-manager, rushing into the green room in a frenzy of indignation. 'Who has devised this ruse? Who has dared—'

'I am the culprit, sir,' I tremblingly interposed, determined at once to speak the truth and dare the consequences. 'I am very sorry, sir, but the child was taken ill, and I thought that—'

'What business had you to think, sir?' roared the stage-manager, stamping his foot in impotent fury. 'Is thought an article of your agreement, sir? Is it therein inserted as a special clause of stipulation? Are you the thinking organ of the green room, sir? Are you not engaged in this establishment to act, sir? and is not acting the reverse of thinking, sir? We don't thank you for your thoughts, sir; your thoughts are idle, mischievous, unwarrantable things, sir. Thoughts, indeed!'—and here he exploded in some very bad language.

'Knocked up! murdered! sent to smithereens!' ejaculated Rolla, stalking with heavy strides into the green room. 'Yes, as I'm a living actor, literally sold! smashed up! kicked to smithereens!'

'What is kicked to smithereens?' I ventured to inquire, at a loss to comprehend the great man's meaning.

'What is kicked to smithereens?—my death-scene, to be sure—my death of deaths—the glory of the London stage—the—pray be patient, sir,' to the enraged stage-manager; 'follow my example, sir. I, the injured party, am resigned, sir, perfectly resigned.'

And the great man's eyes wandered upwards, after the languishing fashion of a dying duck.

'Stage waiting for Pizarro!' shouted the call-boy, speaking from the wing. 'Stage waiting for Pizarro! Speak the first line, sir; speak the first line. Almagro, Valverde, soldiers, all waiting, sir, all waiting!'

Confused and perplexed by the late disaster, I went on for the closing scene of the tragedy, where the tyrant receives his final quietus from the sword of Alonzo. At all times an unskilful swordsman, and rendered on this occasion more than usually awkward by my mental obfuscation, I sawed right and left at my alarmed antagonist, regardless alike of time and the generally recognized principles of fencing. A cry from my companion recalled me to myself. I looked up, and lo! horror of horrors! image of images! the flat front of a noseless face presented before me an alarming spectacle. Yes, as true as I am a living creature, the keen edge of my unpractised sword had glanced up from the chin of my opponent, and taken his nose clean off. There he stood, the petrified Alonzo, his arms extended in the air, and minus that important feature which is of an Englishman's face the pride and glory. Oh, the scene of horror that ensued! The man was borne to the county hospital; and myself served upon the spot with a summary ignominious 'notice to quit.' I pocketed the humiliating writ, and turned my back upon the scene of this, my first initiation in the art of the immortal Thespis.

I arrived a few days afterwards in London, and found my father negotiating with the lawyers respecting the amount of compensation damages justly due to 'Alonzo' for the very serious injury that individual had sustained.

E.



TOWN TRAVELS.

The Corn Exchange, Mark Lane.

ONE very salutary result of exploring the haunts of commerce in the bustling capital of this empire is, that it dispels many lamentably erroneous notions of those haunts and the people by whom they are frequented. There is a wide-spread belief, for instance, among many sensible persons, that city men, as a class, are an anxious overworked body, who spend the whole of their days in a whirl of incessant worry; who perpetually make tremendous speculations, and tremble in agony for the peace of Europe; who run out of their offices at all hours to see how the funds stand, and to ask whether Peruvian Sixes are at par; who never see their wives and families except on Sunday; and who principally live upon dry sherry and Abernethy biscuits.

There can be no doubt that many city men of this stamp are easily to be found (in plays and novels), together with bankers prone to midnight assassination, and merchants who curse their only daughter for running away with her drawing-master, or cut off their eldest son with a shilling for refusing to marry an heiress, whose only drawbacks are—age, ugliness, and a hare lip; but it is equally beyond doubt that these same city men cannot be so easily found anywhere else. You won't find them on Cornhill; you won't find them in Change Alley; they are not to be met with in Cheapside; they make no sign in Thames Street; Broad Street is unacquainted with their presence; and Lombard Street is in the same state of ignorance. But above all, Mark Lane is a spot where they fail to congregate, and as it is part of our programme to visit that famous centre, let us proceed there to-day and verify the fact for ourselves.

It is Monday, and accordingly principal market day of the week; the two others being of but secondary importance. The clock has just struck one; the place is full,

and business is at its height. A better moment for visiting the London Corn Exchange could not therefore be chosen.

We look around, and what do we see? Why we see an assemblage of clean, shrewd, cheerful, healthy-looking men, calmly established at the stands all round the building on which samples are displayed; we see others quietly passing to and fro and examining those samples; others lazily loitering against the somewhat robust pillars that adorn the interior; while a still larger number are collected in groups, chatting carelessly upon the topics of the day and the disastrous state of the trade with which they are specially connected. These evidently are not the city men of whom we are in search. Let us look farther afield.

Yet stay. The great bulk of the people here, we can see at a glance, are not city men at all. That ruddy-faced, broad-shouldered, cleanly-shaved gentleman, with the wide-brimmed hat, the neat blue-spotted neck-tie, the cut away shooting-coat, and the somewhat tightly-fitting trousers, is a farmer from North Walsham. That little rolling fellow, with the Guernsey shirt, the glazed hat, and the tarry trousers—

'bowed up together, all
Guiltless of braces as those of Charles Wetherell,'

is a skipper from the banks of the Orwell. Those awkwardly dressed fellows, rough but honest looking, whose clothes are full of creases which tell of a seclusion undisturbed except on high days and holidays, and who are so persistently blocking up the very threshold of the market, are Kentish hoymen. The spruce men, who are evidently so fond of cheerful tweeds and pleasant scarfs, are millers; and if we look elsewhere we shall see nothing but clerks, outsiders, country people, and suburban dealers.

Let us go back again, therefore, to the gentlemen at the stands. Having noted their external aspect

we will mark now the manner in which they conduct their business, and see what indication it affords of their inner characteristics.

We approach a stand, behind which a city man, most resolutely shaved and of singularly bland mien, is seated. He is reading 'The Times' newspaper. A possible customer approaches, dips his hand into the sample of barley displayed on the stand, peers carelessly at it, winnows it with his fingers, nibbles at it with his front teeth, looks knowing, and asks the price.

What does the occupant of the stand do? Does he smirk or smile, or incline his head, or look amiably silly, or announce by his features, as he would were he a retail hosier, mercer, or butterman, that to wait upon this one particular customer is the all-absorbing idea he has cherished ever since he came into the world? Not a bit of it. He certainly puts aside 'The Times,' but it is with an air of only half-aroused attention, which shows that he is thinking more of the leading article he was reading than of the question put to him. That question was brief, but his reply is briefer.

'How much?' asks the individual in front of the stand.

'Twenty,' replies the individual behind it; ere he subsides again into 'The Times.'

Now the word *twenty*, like any other word in the English language, may be spoken in every variety of tone. It may be spoken in a persuasive tone; it may be spoken in a repelling tone. It may be spoken urbanely; it may be spoken in the manner called bearish. It may tell of Decision's firmness or of Hesitation's wavering. It may be gloomily stern or cheerfully frolicsome. As spoken in this instance it is simply an expression of jaunty indifference, carrying with it the suggestion of a loll, both hands in the pockets, and a straw in the mouth.

The gentleman at the stand evidently cares nothing whether the price suits or does not suit; whether the quality answers to what is wanted or to what is not wanted; whether the inquirer buys or lets it

alone. *Twenty* is the rate at which he means to sell to-day if he sells at all, and his eye plainly says, if not his voice, that he will see the entire commercial community hanged before he accepts a lower figure. Messrs. Swan and Edgar sitting smoking at the door of their premises in Regent Street, with a decanter of port before them, obstructing the entrance by crossing their legs, refusing to alter this position to suit the convenience of customers, and freely using the door-mat for expectoral purposes, would present a picture of trading indifference scarcely more noteworthy than that we are looking upon.

As a natural consequence of this mode of doing business there is not the slightest trace of commercial sternness in the aspect of the Corn Exchange. If you go into Glyn's or the London and Westminster, the awful array of clerks, the decorum of the arrangements, the nature of the place, the questioning suspiciousness of the cashiers, to say nothing about the overpowering dignity of the hall porters, all combine to fill you with respectful timidity, and make you feel like an unconvicted forger or a bashful ticket-of-leave man. At the Corn Exchange, on the other hand, you feel at home at once, and elbow your way through the throng with all the unconcern of a stout alderman or a slim newsboy. If you ask a question here you may get a somewhat off-hand reply, perhaps, but you won't be snapped up short as in certain city haunts, or be referred with cutting acerbity to the 'other counter,' or the 'country office.' Nay, the writer of these lines verily believes that if, from a pure spirit of waggery, you were to ask the price of skimmed milk or hot codlins, you would be gladly welcomed as a diverting fellow, instead of being ignominiously expelled the market precincts. And lest this expression of opinion should seem fantastic and unsustainable, the holder of it would ask, in support of his views, whether it is not notorious that the frequenters of the Corn Exchange are, as a body, of

a decidedly frolicsome temperament, and rather fond than otherwise of any little incident which agreeably diversifies the regular progress of market routine. He would ask especially, whether it is or is not true that at or about last Christmas time a football was accidentally discovered in the very centre of the building? Whether upon the discovery being made the whole market did or did not rise as one man to have a kick at the said football? Whether factors did or did not leave their stands, clerks their desks, buyers their lounging places, and farmers their cautious reserve, to join the sport? Pursuing his inquiries, he would ask whether this scene of unbridled licence did or did not last for about ten minutes, amid the boisterous shouting and rough laughter alike of grey-haired men and beardless boys, and whether it was or was not put an end to by a serious Scotchman of rigid principles, who was scandalized by this riotous display of unbecoming mirth and frivolity? Having asked these questions he would confidently leave his case in the hands of the impartial reader, certain beforehand of the tenour of the replies that must inevitably be made to him.

Nevertheless (if we may for once commence a sentence with that imposing adverb), nevertheless, it would be a grievous error to suppose that it is all play and no work on the London Corn Exchange.

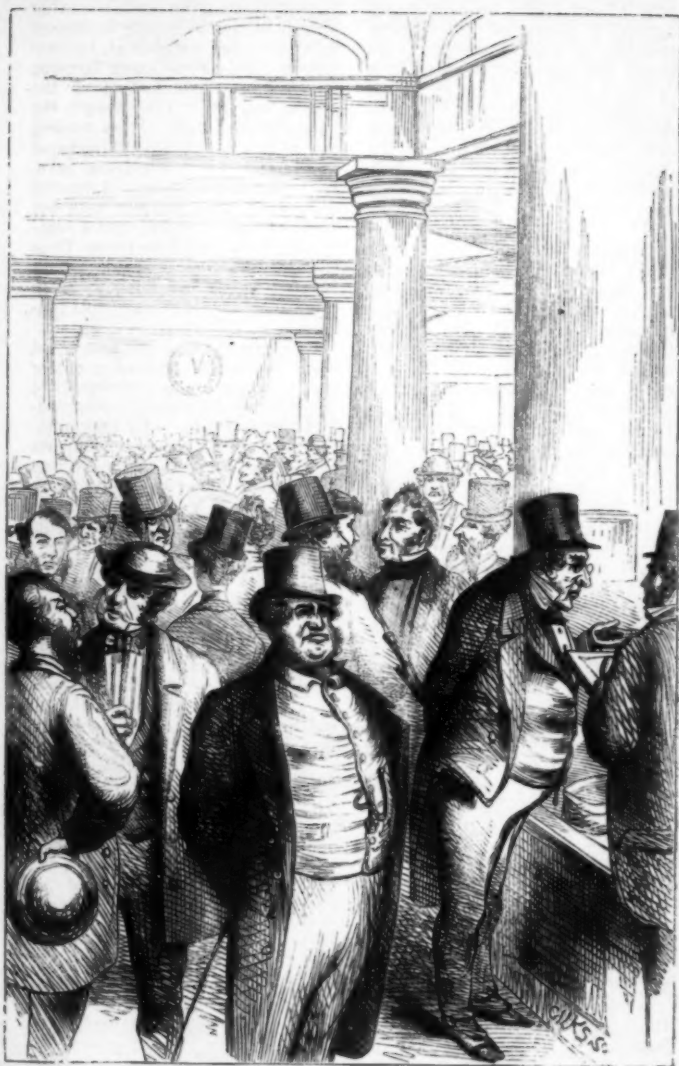
Because everything is not hurry and drive, shout and perspiration, it by no means follows that an immense amount of business is not transacted. Indeed, the development of the trade (to approach the subject seriously) has been enormous, especially since the repeal of the Corn Laws. But when present operations are contrasted with those, say, of a hundred years ago, the increase appears almost marvellous. It sounds like an old wife's tale to hear that, no further back than the commencement of the last century, there was, so to speak, no corn-market at all in London. Corn was certainly sold at a special place, to wit, at Bear Quay, in Thames Street;

and flour at Greenhithe and Holborn Bridge; but the factorage or agency system, by which trading operations are so greatly facilitated in our own day, was then all but unknown. To certain Essex farmers, it seems, the introduction of the system was due. They were in the habit, we are told, of frequenting one of the roomy old Whitechapel inns; and, for convenience sake, they fell into the custom of leaving samples of their produce with the landlord, and of paying him a commission for selling it for them. Thus the first corn-factor, or intermediary between buyer and seller, arose in the person of this Whitechapel inn-keeper.

Of course the idea was soon acted upon by others. Shrewd men saw that here was a new business to be opened out; and corn-factors accordingly grew apace. As they established their stands in various parts of the city—wherever, in fact, it best suited their convenience—people in time found that trade would be greatly facilitated if all these stands were brought to a common centre; and to accomplish this the Mark Lane Corn Exchange was erected. And to think that this was no further back than the year 1747!

Almost equally surprising is the fact that the market remained, as originally erected, for the best part of a century. The production of the country had so far increased that, whereas in 1689 only fourteen million bushels of wheat (according to Gregory King) were grown in England, no fewer than one hundred million bushels were grown in 1828; and trade had, of course, increased in the same proportion. But it was not until the latter year that the Corn Market underwent any enlargement.

We may be quite sure, however, that long before that time the place had become insufficient in size for the business which had to be carried on in it. Indeed, if we may credit the prospectus of a proposed new Corn Exchange issued in 1825, the inconvenience must have been serious indeed. 'The difficulty of obtaining a stand is so great,' it says, 'that many persons of unim-



A SKETCH IN THE CORN EXCHANGE.

peachable character and respectability in the trade have been in vain soliciting—one for twelve to eighteen years—and others equally eligible deterred from making application. When the present Exchange was erected, there was not above one-fourth of the quantity of corn sold in London that is now sold there. The want of accommodation, both for the factors and the public attending it, is apparent to every one who visits it in the hours it is open; indeed several persons are obliged to have stands in the adjacent houses; others to transact their business in taverns, in the street, and under gateways, to the great annoyance of the neighbourhood, who have made it a subject of complaint to the city authorities.

To be sure, 1825 was the period when joint-stock prospectuses were fully as rich in promise and as daring in assertion as they became twenty years afterwards, when the great railway fever set in; and the statements above quoted are not of the kind which any inquirer need feel bound to swallow whole without examination. But the fact that the old Corn Exchange was rebuilt and considerably enlarged three years afterwards, and a second market added, seems to show that in this case a pressing want had actually been pointed out.

Even now, although the market has again been enlarged since 1850, individuals are still to be seen doing business 'in taverns, in the street, and under gateways,' in and about Mark Lane; but this arises, it is to be presumed, from erratic taste rather than from harsh necessity.

It may sound somewhat paradoxical, but it is nevertheless strictly true, that one of the most striking evidences of the amount of business transacted on the London Corn Exchange is to be seen when the operations of the day are over, and buyer and seller have alike departed.

While transactions are actively proceeding, the visitor must be struck with a habit indulged in by every regular frequenter—that of dipping the hand lightly into the nearest sample-bag, tasting one

or two of the grains taken out, and allowing the rest to fall to the ground. This very innocent materially assists in producing a result which, under the circumstances, can scarcely be regarded as surprising. The floor becomes thickly strewn with every kind of grain, oats generally predominating, owing to the larger quantity contained in the sample-bags sent to market. While the place is crowded with people the full extent of the deposit is so far apparent that you appear to be treading upon some incongruous compound resembling underdone pease-pudding, but to thoroughly estimate its amount you must see it when everyone has left. Let us have a peep, therefore, at the market now that business is over.

The place is in the sole possession of the officials, and they are vigorously sweeping the strewn grain into heaps. Very pretty little heaps they are, too; and yonder sacks, twelve to fourteen in number, will soon be filled with them. A few minutes more, and the work is done—the sacks are filled.

And now, in the innocence of your heart, you perhaps imagine (not being as familiar with grain as *le père Goriot*) that these sacks of corn-market sweepings are of no earthly use, and that the only object of removing them is to throw them into the dusthole. Oh, childlike simplicity and ignorance! Those sacks will each command a respectable price at the corn-chandler's; and if they were ten times more numerous they would only too eagerly be snatched up. And what then, you ask, is done with them? What is done with them? Do you keep (to paraphrase Mr. Thorley's advertisement), do you keep chickens, ducks, pigs, or cab-homes? If you do, assuredly there was no need to ask that question. Why these sweepings not only find a ready sale, as food for the animals above-named, but there is such a wide demand for them that they are actually MANUFACTURED (I know of no more appropriate word) in order to meet that demand! Yes! It is even so. Corn Market sweepings are as regu-

lar an article of commerce as pickling vinegar or split peas, and can be obtained to any extent just as readily. And here another branch of this interesting subject opens out.

These sweepings being regularly bought and sold, it follows that the money paid for them goes into somebody's pocket; and that the somebody (to use a colloquial phrase) must make a very good thing of it. Now, who is this fortunate person?

In the good old times it was the sweeper of the market, who took away this refuse as a perquisite; and, if tradition speaks truly, the perquisite sometimes brought him in from 1500*l.* to 1600*l.* per annum. Fancy a sweeper with 1500*l.* a year! Even Thackeray's could not have made more out of his crossing by the Mansion House.

Of course this Corn Market sweeper must have had his villa at Dulwich, at Chiselhurst, or at Wanstead. Of course he was a high Tory, drove his trap into town, had a cellar of exceedingly fine old port, and, perhaps, cultivated a taste for Shakspeare and the musical glasses. Of course, too, the rougher and more irksome duties of his office, viz., the actual sweeping, was performed by deputy; so that the painful anomaly was not seen of a cultivated gentleman stripping off his coat, tucking up his shirt-sleeves, putting on his apron, grasping his broom, and working away like a housemaid or an errand-boy. Altogether it must have been as pleasant, if not as dignified a berth as that which Sancho Panza pined for.

Alas! it exists no longer. The subject is involved in some obscurity; but a widespread belief prevails in city circles that this appointment, like many others of a somewhat similar kind which formerly contributed to our country's greatness, has so changed with changing times, that virtually it may be said to be abolished. There is an idea abroad that the Committee of the Corn Exchange do their own sweeping themselves, or rather pay fair wages for getting it done, and apply the proceeds to the general fund, out of which current expenses have to be met. If this be so, it is mournful to think of the progress, even in the city, of those subversive ideas of economy and retrenchment which we used to be assured, years ago, would sap the foundation of our commercial prosperity, and jostle the very palladium of our national greatness. But if it be not so; if the Corn Exchange Committee still fondly cling to the memory of their sweeper, and respect the sacred traditions of the past, the writer of this paper takes the opportunity of stating that he is acquainted with an individual who would be willing (when the next vacancy occurs) to undertake the duties of the appointment *without salary*, as an earnest of his zeal and integrity. This announcement is, of course, made in the strictest confidence, and all communications upon the subject (none but principals being treated with) may be addressed to

E. C.



WINTER QUARTERS.



N English winter and spring! or, worse still, a London winter and spring! Fog, damp, colds, coughs, rheumatism, mud, and misery. Destruction to boots and umbrellas, and much damage both to health and temper. Fond as we are of field-sports, and real, fine English winter weather (when we get it), we rather like being in *swarm* quarters—south or south-west of England, if not abroad. Compare fog and cold and being shut up in one's room for days together, with sun and happiness, fruit, and enjoyable exercise! People may say we are croaking; let them say so: all we know is this—that no old crow with rheumatism in his right claw, or a cough, and a chill at the root of every feather, ever croaked half as much as we do in a solid fine November fog. One can cut it in slices, though we have not heard it has yet been done. By-the-bye, what fine stuff for analysis—bottled fog. Would it evaporate, or form crystals, or produce gas or mushrooms? A patent fog-producer we shall have next; a fog percolator, almost as good as the very useful machine for making coffee; and the proceeds would be twice as nourishing, and 'werry fillin' at the price,' as immortal Sam Weller said.

But to return to our South-downs and Dartmoors.

We desired much last spring to go anywhere *except* to law and inns of court, and health made a change imperative, so as Torquay had been honoured before, a short stay there was expected to prove again beneficial. So down to Devonshire we went. In London the patent fog had just commenced, but had not quite arrived at its full thickness; and directly the express train of the Great Western Company had dragged its tail a few miles from town the air was as clear and different as possible. The snow lay thick on the ground, and sprinkled the budding trees; the cottages seemed to have a fine twelfth-cake-like icing, and the dark sides appeared like the richness *under* the icing—in the distance.

A railway journey now-a-days is an old tale; most people have said something about it, and yet there is always a degree of novelty to be discovered. Everybody likes to read about what he has himself seen or heard, and the more natural and true such an account is, the better. Many of our best novels at the present day owe much of their popularity to the very commonplace nature of their contents. All is true to nature, and most readers can feel it all. The days have begun to pass away when tales of mystery, ghosts, ghouls, and murders are *essential* to a book's well doing. These may and do come in occasionally even now, and are a change, and amusing enough when well written, but they are not the standard works of fiction as in former days.

'All trains stop at Swindon for ten minutes.' Very satisfactory, no doubt, to those who sell the refreshments, but we have never had any satisfaction in luncheon or coffee during the ten minutes allowed for feeding. We have generally passed the stage of savage hunger, when even a 'missionary pie' might be welcome, and have relapsed into a sullen and uncompromising starvation, utterly unable to take sandwiches or Buns. And not being a 'cassowary,' we could not devour our shilling 'green cover,' or the supplement to 'The Times' (no small meal now-a-days); and support at the period of savage hunger could not be afforded to our body by chewing the corners of the beloved portmanteau. No; Swindon has much to answer for.

As we got south snow disappeared, and the willow showed, bright and green on the damp land, the commencement of spring. A few primroses appeared, as if half-ashamed of being so unfashionably early, and the very young ferns were just beginning to unroll themselves. We must premise that we were going to Torquay without any definite ideas of destination, and did not know where we should spread our blanket for the night.

The town was full, as usual, and, by unforeseen circumstances, we had been unable to provide beforehand. However, we take things coolly, or try to do so usually, and our difficulties were soon brought to an end by the kindness of some friends who met us at the station. We were soon housed, not to perfection, perhaps, for several reasons, but well enough, as we hoped the sun would shine all day long, and the sky continue blue for several weeks. Alas! rain—wind—sleet!—that those things should have been seen in Torquay! We grieve to say they were—and more than once. For nearly three weeks the sun showed himself sparingly. He may have been up early at evening parties, or gone to visit the man in the moon; at all events he stayed at home much longer than was agreeable, and the old gardener took advantage of his absence to empty all his watering cans over Torquay. However, we managed to enjoy ourselves very fairly, and we are at this moment considering how we could have got on at all had it not been for kind friends, who cheered and smoothed our much ruffled feathers.

Not far from Torquay there is a lovely little church called Cockington. It is covered with ivy, and is a charming object in spring when the bright colours come on the trees. All the lanes in the neighbourhood are gems; the high and broad banks (terrible waste for the land) are covered with vegetation at this season—which ought to be always pleasant—and the primroses and other wild flowers brighten their sides, while the gnarled and stunted roots of trees form a natural protection at the top, for only a few are

allowed to grow, the rest are cut down year by year.

How it rained and blew! Great guns, decidedly; and Admiral Fitzroy's storm signals were almost always displayed from the signal-post.

When it was fine we managed to get out for a walk, or went to the club; when it was not, we had the privilege of hearing a performance on the piano in the next room, for sometimes *ten* hours. How the performer could do it we cannot say. Such was the case; fatigue seemed impossible; but our ears were open to satiety, and before we left we knew every note of all the miserable chords and scales. There was never an attempt at a 'piece' or a 'tune' but it was a lesson of patience for *us*.

We walked over to Paignton, roamed about, refreshed ourselves at the hotel, and came back by train.

We rambled on the beach, strolled on the strand, and occasionally felt bored, and stayed at home a great deal—by necessity, however, when the rain came down. So, in a desultory manner, a few weeks passed, but a change was coming, and that was our bright time.

We were invited to a 'pretty house in a pretty valley,' not far from Torquay, and thither we went in company with a friend. Torquay we left without regret, and we welcomed the train again with pleasure, for we knew there was 'a good time coming,' and therefore 'waited a little longer.'

The country! beyond Torbay is pretty and diversified, and rich in country seats. The moor stretches to the right in rich colouring, bleak and barren-looking, however, in spite of the deep-coloured heather.

The valley we were going to started up suddenly (though we ought hardly to say that of a valley) from a range of open hills, and was well-sheltered by very fine woods. A brawling trout stream ran through the woods and valley, and contained many a fine specimen of Master Speckle. We greatly admire Tennyson's poem of the 'Brook'; this verse applies to many a Devonshire stream:—

'I wind about, and in and out,
With there a blossom sailing,
And here and there a lusty trout,
And here and there a grayling.'

We cannot say as to the grayling in this particular stream, but it was very full of trout, and a very noisy, leaping brook. It rushed furiously over rocks in a fall of no mean dimensions, and carried a body of foaming water large enough to do serious damage.

The woods at this season were barely commencing to look green, but a few weeks promised to clothe them in their spring brightness and beauty.

The 'brawling, bubbling' stream fed a small lake in our host's grounds. It was not wild or romantic enough for a comfortable suicide, but a very jolly little lake notwithstanding, and the speckled trout jumped at the flies continually. A colony of wild ducks swam about on the water, or reposed on an island in the centre. One of them was a famous fellow for diving, and many a time we have imagined there was a fine 'rise' when it was nothing but 'Billy Dux' (as he was christened) enjoying a 'sensation header.' How well he turned over, just showing his funny little webbed feet, and then disappeared for what seemed a very long time, and at last appeared again, always wet and lively. We hope he found something at the bottom worth diving for; indeed his enemies said he ate the trout, but that was a vile calumny, no doubt. We fear that on land his pace was bad compared with his rivals, for a vicious black duck used to beat him in a hard race, and filch his well-earned bread from him; but once on water, and then Billy's superiority showed itself. Let us hope he reflected that we cannot excel in everything, and that if we act our own parts well we ought to be satisfied. He *looked* a moralizer—but a waddling one.

Those woods; they were pleasant indeed. We remember quite well some strolls up a steep hill, and then ten minutes' severe 'blow,' although it required luncheon to put renewed vigour into our chest and limbs. And the pretty young

lambs too, reminding one so forcibly of mint sauce, and about luncheon time, indeed, these reminders had a tendency to make one savage; and the bridge, romantic and tarry, with a pretty view of the ever-lovely stream, where a person of an imaginative disposition might fancy he saw the flash of a trout's tail among the foaming masses of water, and thereby add to his mental luncheon.

Glimpses of fair damsels in the woods, too, who would not fall into shallow water, where we might peril our lives on their behalf, and by which we might win a smile and a Royal Humane Society's medal; and pleasant mornings at home, with pleasant and merry talk—these things being agreeable reminiscences to our mind, and make us hate the fog and mud of town more and more, and think of the dark portals and stately courts of the Temple with disdain!

Well, to finish with this sketch; we left that part of the country, having spent as pleasant a time as we ever remember to have passed anywhere, with hopes of seeing it again in the course of our existence.

After all this came, as usual, the prosaic express; and at the station we had to wait some half-hour or more, which time was employed in the wicked consumption of Sir Walter Raleigh's favourite herb, and in petting some dogs that happened to be about. We talked learnedly to a farmer about the crops, and noticed his collie, and, after some conversation, became decidedly of opinion that the dog was far more sensible than his master. Two setters, old and stiff, received at our hands marked attention; and then the huge worm crept quickly up, and carried us off to London, 'hys smoke.'

Another time we wanted to go up the river Dart, and made rather a wild-goose chase thither, as follows. We went by train to Brixham, whence we hoped to find a conveyance which was to carry us on to Dartmouth; but when we arrived there were none. This was tiresome; so we proposed walking the four miles, and another traveller,

who was in the same plight, proposed to join us; so we set off for an hour's walk, for the steamer was to start in that time, and if that was missed we should hardly be able to get home that night. Now four miles is not anything very dreadful to perform in an hour on a good road; but the Devonshire hills are famous, and very apt to cause a puffing and blowing, not quite conducive to comfort, and a dusty day made the matter worse. We met very few people, and did not see much in the way of scenery, and in rather less than the time arrived at Dartmouth. But we happened to be on the wrong side of the river! There was a tolerably broad piece of water to be crossed before we could reach the steamer, and she was letting off her superfluous steam, and loosing from the pier. Our hair did not turn white, it did not even bristle, but we felt very uncomfortable, and rushed immediately into a boat. But wind and tide were against us, of course, and the old man who propelled us was decidedly a screw; he was done up, and could hardly move an oar. At last we landed, and directed by our companion, almost ran through the narrow streets of Dartmouth to the pier. The captain of the steamer saw us, so we then slackened our pace, and, walking majestically, stepped on board the vessel as the paddles revolved. We thought ourselves rather lucky. This had caused a slight heat, and as the wind was cold we went into the cabin and lay down on the sofa, to cool. After a time we admired the scenery, saw the devastation caused by a fire in a little village hard by, and thought the woods must look very pretty later in the year. So the time passed in this manner, and we arrived at Totness. Then we walked to the station, got into a train, and came back again home, tolerably pleased with the day's journey, but 'sold' about it, in some things. The sun was in bad temper, and did not show himself enough; indeed, he ought not to have allowed his celebrated quarrel with the man in the moon to get to such a pitch; he ought to have

thought of his friends' comfort first, but didn't.

After all, how very different all the so-called warm places of England are when compared with the south of Europe. Everything is so uncertain in England—one day it freezes, the next the sun burns you up, and an east wind finishes up your cold and cough. You make all your out-door engagements with the proviso, 'If it is fine,' and the days appointed for pic-nics and fêtes are proverbially wet and dreary. It is a rare thing that a flower-show is enjoyed at the Botanic in London in fine weather; a heavy shower generally comes on towards the evening, just sufficient to drench everybody, and give work to the doctors. Nobody can go to these places prepared for wet, with a macintosh coat or cloak on, goloshes on the feet, and a waterproof hood for hat or bonnet; that would be simply ridiculous, and Aquarius takes a mean advantage of thin boots and 'lovely things in bonnets,' not to talk of marvellous dresses, and the dearest little lavender or stone-coloured gloves in the world. He is a sour old mortal, and likes to spoil sport.

One meets some very pleasant people at places intended for invalids, and habited by anybody who likes, and some very curious and rare, not to say unpleasant ones. When people choose to commence discussions entirely on their own responsibility, they must expect to find their opinions contrary to those of some persons present, and if they choose to become personal, and try to argue without the slightest regard to the first rules of logic, they had much better leave it alone, and not bring forward matters on which they have strong feelings, which allow of 'party' discussion. We don't mean to say that an Englishman dislikes a political 'argumentation,' but he is not usually bigoted about it, and generally knows, at all events, what is due to society and himself.

As we are writing on winter quarters, we may be permitted to say a few words on a rather dreary place we once honoured with our presence. It is a place not far from Toulon, in

the south of France, and may be known to many—Hyères.

On our way there we stayed at Toulon for the night, and found the inhabitants of the hotel rather too regardless of soap and water, indeed, they seemed to consider these things as totally superfluous. We managed, however, to spend a 'lively' night, and went off by diligence in the morning, eastward. The town of Hyères, which is about three hours' journey from Toulon, consists of one long street for the aristocrats and a heap of dirty houses for the 'plebeians.' It is admirably adapted for those who like the 'mistral,' as this wind runs up the street with all its fury, so that you cannot go out without meeting it. At first we went to a large and palatial hotel, but soon discovered that charges were good and nothing else, and the discomfort was so marked that we soon left.

Between the sea and Hyères are about three miles of marshy land, covered with water in winter, and famous for wild ducks. There is too much miasma arising from these lowlands to make the place very healthy, and we have often wondered why invalids choose it as a winter residence. On our arrival we expected to find horses and carriages, and means of getting about the country, for it is certainly very pretty, and from the town, looking over the sea, with the island in the distance, it is really picturesque. To our horror, we discovered, first, that there were only two horses in the place; secondly, that both were lame; and thirdly, that donkeys were the only animals to be hired. Now, our legs are none of the shortest, and we had very serious doubts about the use of a donkey, for in many cases the fatigue of tying the limbs into a knot to escape touching the ground would be as fatiguing as walking.

There was no library in the place, no reading-room, and no well-sheltered promenade. The 'mistral' blew almost continuously, and the dust was terrible. It was decidedly dull and stupid.

There were a good many visitors, but most of them very ill, so ill

that they ought never to have come there. Walking parties were the fashion for those who were strong. We tried these once or twice, but found them very hard work, for some people could easily walk four and five hours at a time over the hills, and the rest felt obliged to follow. Then the ladies were far too much taken up with their studies to make things altogether pleasant. Was a pic-nic or expedition proposed, 'they must go to their German,' or their 'Hebrew' (for absolutely they had a Hebrew class), or any other of the things they happened to take a fancy to. No gentlemen were admitted, the only male being the curate, who superintended their studies. If they had not been so studious everything would have gone on better, but study took all the fun out of them.

One day, however, we had a rather amusing expedition along the coast. Nearly twenty of us started, all mounted on donkeys, and a fine sight it was. We happened to have a small animal, of course, but for some time all went well. Sometimes one or two careless riders came to grief, and a few small boys who were of the party caused great excitement by their mad pranks; but at last we went on smoothly, once or twice even having a gallop. Now it happened that we waited for a minute or two to gather a flower, look after some specimen of coleoptera, or something of that sort, and then endeavoured to make the animal canter in order to overtake the main body; and he did canter for some time, very well too; but as our limbs are long, we were obliged to tuck them up on each side in an ungraceful, not to say uncomfortable manner, and stick on as well as was possible by the knees. To add to our discomfort the saddle slipped round every ten minutes. Of a sudden the wretched brute stopped—stopped as if he had been shot—put his head between his legs, and kicked like a thoroughbred. Of course we were shot off. The saddle instantly turned round, and went on the brute's shoulders, and the next thing we remember was a vision of being jumped over by a hairy animal.

Then we got up and walked ignominiously on. Certainly everything was against a firm seat, and saddles do not, as a rule, hang on an animal's back by balance merely, for in this case the girths did the poor service of only preventing the saddle falling to the ground. Here was the animal capering about, and gradually getting nearer the party in front, and we were walking. We pass over the humiliating scene that ensued on reaching them. We then generously lent the donkey and the saddle to a small boy who was walking. He was instantly taken into a deep ditch, thrown, and covered with mud, and the donkey scrambled out and shook himself. However, he was ridden by all the youngsters in turn, and after that his spirits subsided. We lunched under some firs, and rambled along the beach, and returning home another way, came quite 'promiscuous,' as Mrs. Gamp says, on a small piece of water—a lagoon formed by the sea—and opening into it by a short canal. We could not very well go back, and the difficulty was how to go forward, for the donkeys would not face the water, and the ladies were alarmed. There was a small boat at the other end of the lagoon, belonging to the guard-house, and one adventurous spirit forced his donkey through the water and seized the boat, which took all the ladies over in good order. Then the gentlemen returned, and the animals were gradually forced into the water. One used the whip and two pushed, and although the wretched brutes resisted strenuously, human strength was too much for them, and they gradually slid into the water, and at once made the best of their way across, followed by us all in the boat. We could hardly walk for laughing, it was so inexpressibly ludicrous applying our shoulders to such low work, but all succeeded in the end. When we were across, a gendarme made his appearance, but he was soon pacified for the loan of his boat, and left cheerfully. Nothing more of moment occurred till we reached home.

We used to practise sometimes with a revolver against the trees on

the beach. The magpies were disgusted, and were often nearly hit, but chattered louder than ever on these occasions.

There are wild boars in the mountains, and a few red-legged partridges in the lowlands, and lots of snakes everywhere. These latter are extremely plentiful, and it was rare to walk out without seeing half a dozen, some small and a few large ones.

We remember having climbed to the top of a rocky hill one day, and were poking about for beetles or other insects, when we heard a most alarming 'hiss,' loud and close. We moved away, and began throwing stones into a few crevices in the rocks. To our surprise, hisses came from every hole, and we began to think we had come into a colony of snakes. Such was the case we suppose, as we saw the coils of one brute in a crevice, and might have seen others had we been so disposed. We know not whether they were poisonous or not, and as we had no desire to sacrifice our valuable lives in the cause of science, we 'made tracks' down again, amidst a strange small chorus of hisses. We never heard so many at one time. They may have proceeded from small snakes, but it did not sound pleasant anyhow.

We changed soon to a French hotel, or rather a pension. Here we found much more comfort, and though everything was homely, and the people of the house easy and familiar, we got on very well. The *Hôtel des Hespérides* (what queer names the French sometimes choose!) was a small house, and there were only two or three visitors besides ourselves. The hostess was a lively old woman, full of gossip and talk, and 'mademoiselle,' her pretty daughter, had her full share of fun and gaiety. In the evenings we used to play sometimes at 'ouiste,' as they called it, or dominos, and otherwise improve our French by as much conversation as we could wish for. The ladies certainly were quite willing to talk, and liked being listened to. One or two lively Frenchmen formed part of our mess, and the discussions on every subject

were hot and exciting. They never forgot themselves, but rather liked a little argument, and, like most discussions, these usually ended in making each one more firmly wedded than ever to his own opinions, and more certain than before that his opponent 'couldn't argue at all.' However, we were comfortable in the Hespérides, and the charges were moderate. It would not have suited many people, for the habits were decidedly French; but for our own part, we think it a mistake to

search for English customs whenever one is abroad. One ought to accustom oneself, to a certain extent, to the habits of the people with whom one happens to be placed, and we know by experience it is conducive to much more comfort and good understanding between all parties.

A title says but little, we believe, and we must now cut short these rambling notes on 'Our Winter Quarters.'

H. J. C. B.

WAS IT TRUE?

WAS it true, or was I dreaming?
 Did you love me, dear, that night?
 Was it only fairest seeming,
 Or as real as it was bright?
 Did I feel your kisses falling—
 Falling softly on my hair?
 While a silence, soul-enthraling,
 Held the pulses of the air.
 Not a rose-leaf fluttered downwards
 In the strange, electric calm;
 Only just we two seemed living,
 Breathing musky breaths of balm.
 Overhead, the coming thunder;
 Underneath, the lava crust;
 Near at hand, the dead Pompeii,
 With its story-telling dust.
 Weird and ghost-like in its beauty
 Lay the landscape at our feet,
 While you wooed me in the poets'
 Mystic numbers, as was meet.
 But the downy mist has vanished,
 Clear and hard the sunbeams glare;
 And they burn away my picture,
 Leaving only common air.
 Only you can breathe upon it,
 Bring its colours back again;
 Only you can make it real
 To the healing of my pain.
 So, the sweetness and the sorrow,
 I reserve them both for you;
 If we only meet in Heaven,
 I will ask you 'Was it true?'

S.

'TEN SHILLINGS A NIGHT.'

ONLY ten shillings a night!
 The player patiently sits,
 Whilst satin and diamonds gleam in the light,
 And Folly around her flits:

Flits with a thoughtless scorn
 A poor friend it is *ton* to forget:
 Stay, my girl—though papa *is* a millionaire,
 You may be a 'young person' yet!

Some little mouths may be crying for bread,
 Perchance, in a supperless home;
 What matters *that* if Fashion be fed
 With the ortolans of Rome?

Merit and talent are worthless straws
 When the tale of wealth is told;
 You may turn the scale of a good man's mind,
 But the 'world' weighs only—gold.

The fair player turns with a wistful glance
 Stealthily round, her head,
 Watching the twinkling feet in the dance—
 The fairy-like musical tread.

'Nellie and I were a school-girl pair,
 And for ever to love was our vow;
 By me she flaunts with a heartless stare,
 I am not a "lady" now.

'Can it be to me that her beautiful face
 Is purposely from me bent?
 Oh! to think a single fall of her lace
 Would pay us a year of rent!

'ONLY ten shillings a night,
 Yet we value them every groat;
 They will buy our mother a dress she needs,
 Or Willie a winter coat.'

* * * * *

Only ten pitiful shillings a night!
 God's love on thy golden head,
 They are talents of silver in His great sight,
 Since they pay for a family's bread!

ASTLEY H. BALDWIN.



Drawn by J. H. B. C. 1861

J. H. B. C. 1861

The first of the series is a portrait of a woman.

11

1861

'TEN SHILLINGS A NIGHT.'

ONLY ten shillings a night!
The player patiently sits,
Whilst satin and diamonds gleam in the light,
And Folly around her sits.

Fits with a thoughtless scorn
A poor friend it is to forget;
Stay, my girl!—though papa is a millionaire,
You may be a "young person" yet!

Some little months may be crying for bread,
Peradventure, in a superfluous house;
What matters that if Fashion be fast
With the ortolans of Rome?

And she will never be thoughtless again
When she sees the world as it really is;
And she will never be thoughtless again
When she sees the world as it really is.

The old school house with a wailing piano
Whispering round her wall,
Watching the twinkling beat in the dance—
The fairy-like musical tread.

'Nellie and I were a school-girl pair,
And far over to love was our vow;
By me she bounds with a heartless stare,
I see not a "holy" now.

'You'll be the one that her beautiful face
So brightly than our best;
You'll be the one that a single fall of her lace
Would pay us a year of rent!

'Only ten shillings a night,
For the value then every great;
There will pay our mother a cross she needs,
On Wilton's velvet coat.'

Only ten pious shillings a night!
God's love on thy golden head,
They are talents of silver in His great sight,
Must they pay for a family's bread!

ALFRED H. BARNES.

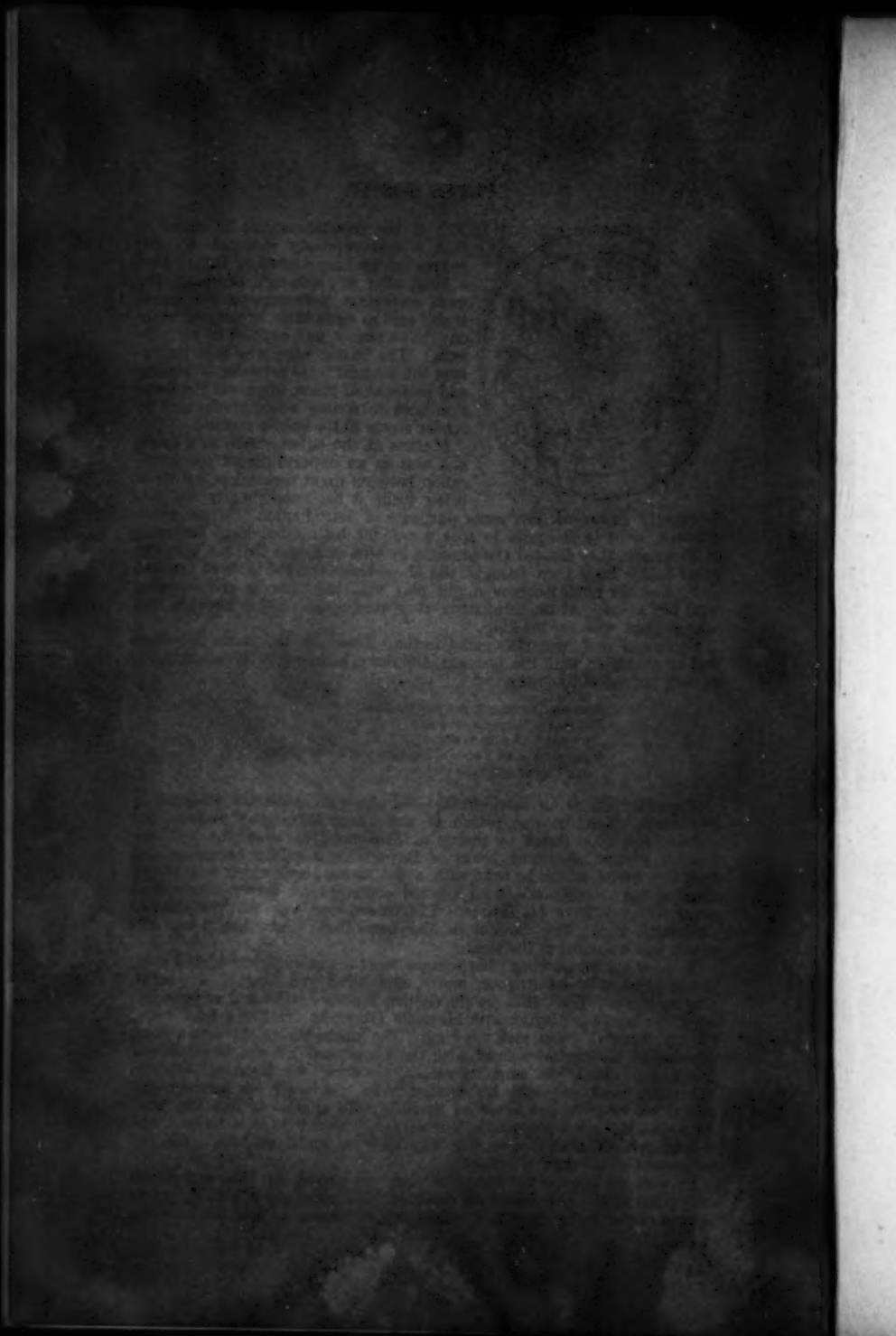


Drawn by Adelaide Claxton.

TEN SHILLINGS A NIGHT!

"The fair player turns with a winful glance."

[Page 620.]



CHESS GOSSIP.



NE of the reputed origins of chess is, that it was expressly invented for the purpose of teaching a youthful despot that a king, after all, although of course the most important personage in the realm, is still able to effect little or nothing without the assistance and support of his subjects. The Indian sage, who thus undertook the joint duties of reformer of royalty and professor of chess, improved the occasion both to convey other truths and to render access to the presence easier.

If chess at the outset served as a lesson and also as an opportunity of communication between great personages and those below them, it has subsequently not less

frequently answered the same purposes of introduction. When noble Ebbeson went to Bohemia to seek a wife for his master, king Valdemar of Denmark, they dressed the princess in blue silk, and led her into the great hall. They then brought the chess-board and the table of massive gold, that the noble Ebbeson might play with the princess and converse with her alone. At the third move they were agreed; noble Ebbeson had won a good wife for his king.

Ferdinand and Miranda's game, in the 'Tempest,' had much the same sort of character, with the pleasant difference, however, of love-making in person, instead of by proxy.

MIRANDA. Sweet lord, you play me false.

FERDINAND. No, my dearest love,

I would not for the world.

MIRANDA. Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,
And I would call it fair play.

A similar 'desire for semi-official *tête-à-têtes* with gentlemen attached to her court, might be one reason of our queen Elizabeth's fondness for chess. She even flirted by means of chessmen; as when she sent Sir Charles Blount, afterwards Duke of Devonshire, a golden chessman, and that the queen, which he wore with a red favour; and which caused the Earl of Essex to remark, with affected contempt, 'I perceive now that every fool will have his favour.' The consequence was that Sir Charles challenged him. They fought in Marybone Park, where Essex was disarmed and wounded in the thigh.

In good old times, when Charlemagne was the existing providential man, it was prudent to mind your moves, and what you were about, while playing chess. The 'Histoire de Gallien Restauré' relates that one day, when the hero was playing with his uncle Tibert, he cried in a loud voice, 'I say "mate!"' and took the king. The uncle, beaten, fell into a rage, pommelled his nephew's head with the chessboard till the blood flowed freely, and called him unpolite names, 'bastard' for instance. Gallien, naturally, went and told his mother, who comforted his sorrows and healed his wounds, but admitted that the title applied to him was true. At which, Gallien philosophically remarked, 'Better to be a bastard and a bold cavalier, than a cowardly lout born in lawful wedlock.' Oh, the refinement of the good old times!

In western Europe the game of chess is played by two adversaries only; and never, like dominoes, cribbage, and some other games, by one against one or by two partners against two, at pleasure. But the Russians

have a chessboard for four players at once, who play two against two. The men for this chessboard are also more numerous than ours.

Chess is supposed to be an imitation of war. Phrenologists tell us that the faculty denoted by the organ of Locality gives what is called *coup d'œil*, and judgment of the capabilities of ground. It is necessary to the military draughtsman, and is of great importance to a general. Dr. Gall mentions that he had observed the organ large in distinguished chess-players; and he conceived their talent to consist in the faculty of clearly mastering a great number of possible positions of the men.

The chessboard is a square field of battle, sub-divided into sixty-four small squares; which gives eight squares along each side. The squares with us are alternately coloured white and black, or white or other uniform light tint and something else readily distinguishable from it. There are luxurious chessboards of white and particoloured marbles, of alabaster and mosaic squares, of gold alternating with inlaid jewels, and precious woods in chequered contrast.

Games, generally, resemble plants and flowers in being based on certain numbers. The key number of the lilies is six; of apples, pears, and roses, five. Cruciferous flowers, as turnip and cabbage, are built on a ground-plan of twos and fours.

And so, at *écarté*, two players manipulate thirty-two cards; at whist, four players try the changes possible with a pack of fifty-two. There are plants, as the grasses, where three is the dominant figure; but an odd number is difficult to introduce into games between adversaries. As there are a few monandrous, one-stamened flowers, so there are (not very many) solitary monandrous or monogynous games. Round games are the Linnæan Polyandria Polygynia of play, sometimes assuming ominous tints, rouge et noir—red, or gules, the colour of blood, and black or sable, the emblem of death.

The squares of the chessboard, amounting to sixty-four, constitute

a very remarkable number. It is not divisible, in any way, by any odd number; but is divisible by multiples of two, and by two itself, until unity is reached at last. It is both a square number and a cube number; it is also both the square of a cube number, and the cube of a square number. For it is the cube of four, which is the square of two; and it is the square of eight, which is the cube of two. Twice two are four, and twice four eight; and four times four are sixteen, and four times sixteen, sixty-four.

Chess has been played, on a regal scale, with living men in appropriate costume, on a natural fighting-ground—a lawn converted into a chessboard by paring the grass for the squares of white, or on a floor prepared for the purpose. Don Juan of Austria used one of the halls in his palace as a chessboard, the different squares being represented by pavements of black and white marble, while disguised soldiers acted as the men.

At chess, each player has sixteen men, occupying at the outset the two rows of squares nearest to each player, and consequently leaving the four intermediate rows (consisting altogether of thirty-two squares) vacant and open for the conflict. The chessmen are of two classes. Eight pawns, *pions*, pioneers, or common soldiers, alike in form, occupy the second row from the player; while eight principal pieces, of different name, shape, and power, are ranged behind them. The positions of the pieces on the board are noteworthy, because they are not *exactly* the same for both players. It makes *some* difference, in the earliest moves, whether you are in the habit of playing black or white.

The chessboard is placed between the players in such a way that each has a white corner square to his right. The castles occupy the corner squares. The name and signification of the castle has curiously varied. In the middle ages it was *rook*, from the name of the fabulous Arab bird which fetched Sinbad the sailor his diamonds. The Italians converted this into *rocca*, signifying

also a rock, or fortress, whence the French naturally called it a *tour*. But the operation known as 'castling,' in which the rook passes over the king, is evidently a much more appropriate act to be performed by a bird than by a fortress. On the Chinese chessboard the castles are called *tehs*, or chariots of war. The Icelanders replace the castles by little captains, which the school-boys name centurions. They have swords by their sides, and their cheeks are swollen, as if they blew in the horn which they hold with both hands. The castle moves perpendicularly and horizontally, up or down, to the right or to the left. Its value is estimated as equal to five pawns. Next to the castles, on the same row, stand the two knights; and after them, in the same way, the two bishops.

Of all the pieces on the chessboard the knight is the only one whose movements have never been modified; they are also the most singular and original, resembling those of none of the others. He goes from his own square to the second from him of an opposite colour, passing the square directly before, behind, or on either side of him, to the one diagonally situated either to the right or the left of it. In doing this, he only is at liberty to leap over either his own pieces or his adversary's. The sole condition requisite is that the square to which he moves be vacant or occupied by an enemy's piece.

This peculiarity of the knight's move has given rise to a curious problem, whose origin is lost in that convenient hiding-place, the night of ages. The knight's problem consists in making him move to every one of the squares of the chessboard without alighting on the same square twice. Two thousand years ago the Brahmins had a way of doing it, which they seem to have kept a secret known only to their own caste, transmitting it from generation to generation. Modern travellers in the Indian Peninsula have seen the feat performed by priests, who refused to communicate the clue to their method. About the middle of the last century the

question attracted the attention of the learned; and in 1759 the Berlin Academy of Sciences offered a prize of 16*ol.* for the best treatise on the subject.

Since that date many have been the solutions given, some even overcoming an increase of the original difficulty; thus the Abbé Durand and one Solvyns, or Sylvans, made the knight start from any indicated square, to finish on any other indicated square of the opposite colour to the first. The latter author demonstrated mathematically that there exist 20,160 different ways of resolving the knight's problem. Troupenas made the knight traverse the chessboard in two series of moves; the first series completely overrunning the thirty-two lower squares; the second series the thirty-two upper ones. Moreover, at the sixty-fourth square, the knight is exactly within a move of the first. Van der Monde also gave a solution with a like termination—an important improvement, for a reason to be mentioned.

We give three clues to this chequered labyrinth, in order somewhat to satisfy our readers' curiosity. In the first, the knight starts from the square numbered 1, then to 2, then to 3, and so on, till he arrives at 64, the square contiguous to that from which he set out on his travels.

42	59	44	9	40	21	46	7
61	10	41	58	45	8	39	20
12	43	60	55	22	57	6	47
53	62	11	30	25	28	19	38
32	13	54	27	56	23	48	5
63	52	31	24	29	26	37	18
14	33	2	51	16	35	4	49
1	64	15	34	3	50	17	36

In the second, Moivre's, he pursues a different course, finishing on a square remote from his starting-point.

34	49	22	11	36	39	24	1
21	10	35	50	23	12	37	40
48	33	62	57	38	25	2	13
9	20	51	54	63	60	41	26
32	47	58	61	56	53	14	3
19	8	55	52	59	64	27	42
46	31	6	17	44	29	4	15
7	18	45	30	5	16	43	28

It is evident that both these solutions can be commenced from any one of the four corner squares of the chessboard.

The third, and the most ingenious, was published by Euler, the celebrated mathematician, in 1766. It is performed as follows:—

42	57	44	9	40	21	46	7
55	10	41	58	45	8	39	20
12	43	56	61	22	59	6	47
63	54	11	30	25	28	19	38
32	13	62	27	60	23	48	5
53	64	31	24	29	26	37	18
14	33	2	51	16	35	4	49
1	52	15	34	3	50	17	36

This set of moves has the signal merit of returning on itself, or being endless. At square 64 the knight is within a move of square 1. With the route well impressed on your memory, you may make the knight start from any indicated square on the chessboard. Suppose square 28 to be fixed on; you have only to move to square 29, and so on, till square 27 be reached, when the board will have been completely traversed.

The piece which we call bishop is named by the French *fou*, meaning thereby not 'madman,' but fool, jester, or buffoon, as appears, amongst other proofs, from a Chess Masquerade danced before Henry IV., in 1607.

'The order thereof was this. Two

men, masked, spread a great cloth chessboard, whose squares were red and white, each about a foot and a half in width.

'After that the violins sounded, and two dressed in Spanish costume, each with a long wand in their hand, entered dancing a *balet* of a grave measure, and then placed themselves each on a camp-stool on opposite sides of the hall. When they were seated, to another *air de balet* entered the eight carnation-coloured pawns; they were little children, who danced very prettily, and who performed amongst themselves a *balet* of sundry and diverse figures. At the last figure each took rank on his square. The eight white pawns had also their own proper *balet*, differing in airs, steps, and figures; these took their places straight in front of the others. The four rocs made their entry, and after several figures, stationed themselves behind the pawns, each on his proper square. In like manner, the knights danced their entry, and ranged themselves in their places. Also the *fools*, armed with baubles and bucklers in hand, with a certain form of combats and different figures, betook themselves into their squares.'

The Abbé Romain, in his poem on chess, says:—

'Au jeu d'échecs tous les peuples ont mis
Les animaux communs dans leur pays:
L'Arabe y met le léger dromadaire,
Et l'Indien l'éléphant; quant à nous,
Peuple fatot, nous y mettons des fous.

'Among their chessmen, nations have put the animals common in their country. The Arab takes the light dromedary, and the Indian the elephant; as for us, a comical people, we employ fools.'

Vida, in his Latin poem, '*Scacchia ludus*,' which has been greatly admired, calls the bishops *sagittiferi juvenes*, archers, a title very suitable to their diagonal movements. Among Charlemagne's chessmen, preserved in the Abbey of St. Denis, the bishop was represented as about to let an arrow fly.

Turkish and Arabian chessmen, in obedience to religious scruples, never imitate the forms of men or animals. The Abbé Toderini saw

a set made of oriental agate, enriched with gold. In Persia he found a greater tolerance of graven images on chessboards. An elephant (our castle) had two men on his back; and the king was enshrined, as it were, in an elaborate kiosk, belvedere, or bower.

The two middle squares, on the line nearest to each player, are the places of the king and the queen; but the white queen stands on a white square, and the black on a black one. Hence, one king has the queen on his right, while the other has *his* to his left.

Phillidor (the grandfather) called the pawns the soul of chess, asserting that no one could be a good player who did not play his pawns well. If a pawn manages to reach the eighth, or furthest row of the chessboard, it is promoted to the rank of queen, or of whatever other piece its owner chooses to give it. Thus, our James I., though he detested chess, could yet turn it to his own account. In a speech which he made to the Commons, in 1609, he told them that kings have the power of abasing or elevating their subjects; just as, in the game of chess, a pawn may be converted into a bishop or a knight.

However popular it may have occasionally become, chess has always maintained for itself a certain aristocratic prestige. It was first introduced into France during the reign of Charlemagne, who is said by his historians to have been passionately fond of it. As already mentioned, he presented the Abbey of St. Denis with a board and a set of men, 'all of ivory, a palm high, and greatly valued.' The Marquis de Châtre, in his '*Jeux d'esprit et de Mémoire*,' says, 'I am aware that chess has always passed for a royal game, or rather for the king of games.' Charles VIII., by an ordinance in 1485, forbade the prisoners in the Châtelet to play at dice; he permitted 'persons of quality only,' arrested for slight and purely civil offences, to play at tric-trac (a complicated form of backgammon) and chess.

As to the intellectual ability required to make a good chess-player,

opinions differ greatly; as well as respecting the value of chess as a means of intellectual training. La-truyère, in his '*Caractères*,' denies that a capacity for chess is any proof of genius. On the other hand, the Prince de Condé (Louis II. de Bourbon) maintained that learning chess was the first step to becoming a good general. Sundry modern Germans have advocated its compulsory introduction into schools, as a branch of elementary education. Denis Diderot, in his '*Neveu de Rameau*,' has the boldness to say, 'Paris is the place in the world, and the Café de la Régence the place in Paris, where chess is played better than anywhere else. It is there that Légal the profound, Phillidor the subtle, and Mayot the solid, encounter each other; that you see the most surprising moves, and hear the most outrageous speeches. For if it is possible to be, like Légal, at once a clever fellow and a great chess-player, it is equally possible to be at once a great chess-player and an ass, like Foubert and Mayot.'

Alfred Delvaux speaks thus of the Café de la Régence, and of the pursuit to which it is mainly devoted. 'I could not enter this temple of *Gambit* without great fear and great respect—respect for those who continue the traditions of Ulysses and Palamedes, of Tamerlane and Alexander the Great—and fear, because the game, in all its forms, and under all its denominations, has always terrified me, as being a sort of deliberate madness, not to employ a harsher term. True,' I continued, addressing my introducer, 'it is better to push little bits of ivory backwards and forwards, without uttering a word or tasting food or drink, for eight hours together by the clock—certainly, that is a hundred times better than to employ the same time in slandering one's neighbour. But, under correction, I believe that a man in his right senses has other functions and duties to perform besides gaming and calumny. The slanderer is a shabby wretch; but the gambler is a useless and unproductive cypher. We have all of us some respectable and decent occupation to employ

our time. Those who, for one reason or another, refuse to attend to it, are neither more nor less than deserters, and I do not see any objection to their being shot as such.'

'My dear fellow,' replied his friend, 'you compel me to quote Méry's observations, which I know as thoroughly by heart as if they were my own. "It is desirable that the science of the chessboard should be cultivated in our public schools; especially as we already learn there many tiresome things which weary the lad and are of no use to the man. There is, at the bottom of the game of chess, a wonderful fund of practical philosophy. Our life is a perpetual duel between ourselves and destiny. The world is a chess-board on which we push our pieces, often at hazard, against a train of circumstances which give us 'mate' at every step. Hence so many faults, so many clumsy combinations, so many wrong moves. He who, in early life, has trained his mind to the calculations of the chess-board, has unconsciously contracted habits of prudence, which will retain their force beyond the horizon of the squares. By keeping on our guard against the harmless stratagems set to entrap us by wooden images, we continue to practise in the world similar tactics of defensive good sense and sharp-sightedness. Life thus becomes a grand game of chess, in which you behold, in all who come in contact with you, persons who, sooner or later, will try to make use of you for their own advantage. Every man you meet is either a piece or a pawn; you guess his intended moves, and lay out your own manoeuvres accordingly."

'But what a melancholy view of life and society!'

'If it is the true one you must accept it all the same. And there is no occasion to be afraid that this continual mental tension will degenerate into a monomania, or keep the mind in perpetual restlessness. Chess players are (mostly) pleasant and cheerful people. M. de Labourdonnais, for instance, intersperses his play with many sallies and witticisms, which never prevent his giving checkmate. In this way,

thanks to habit, perpetual combinations become a second nature; we are hardly conscious of the working of an intellectual mechanism which never stops; the springs set going by the first impulsion serve their purpose by a simple act of the will. How often have chess players ameliorated an ugly aspect of their worldly affairs by clever arrangements, without suspecting that they owed their tact to the study of material combinations!'

The *Gambit* above alluded to is the opening of a game, in which a pawn, sometimes a piece, is sacrificed, in order to make a good attack on the enemy. The word comes from the Italian 'gambetto,' a tripping-up, a turning out, a supplanting. There are multitudes of Gambits, and of works on Gambits, 'The Chess World' for April, 1865, gives a variation of the 'beautiful Evans Gambit,' Muzio's Gambit, one of the prettiest known, consists in sacrificing a knight to gain proportionate advantages. It has been analysed, commented, and varied, by several writers of different nations. In short, there are so many Gambits—Cunningham's, Ponziani's, Allgaier's, Bryan's, and others—that the thorough study of Gambits alone is a formidable undertaking.

At this same Café de la Régence, Napoleon I., before he became Emperor, very often used to play. He opened his games badly; and if his adversary took too long time for consideration, he grew impatient, pinched his lips, and drummed a tattoo on the edge of the board, which soon set the men dancing, and so made a mess of the game. If he lost, it was still worse; he thumped the table with his fist and sent everything flying. Nevertheless, when once the contest was fairly begun, and the strife of battle growing warm, he often made very brilliant moves. He also frequently played chess in the Empress Josephine's apartments. M. Thiers records, on Madame de Remusat's authority, the game which he played at Malmaison while the Duke D'Enghien was being tried, or rather sentenced, at Vincennes.

In Egypt he used to play with M. Poussielgue, a superior performer, who sometimes beat the conqueror of the Pyramids. During the Polish Campaign, the Persian Ambassador was introduced to the Emperor while he was playing a game of chess with Berthier. Napoleon did not put himself out of his way, but gave the audience while continuing to move his men. Chess beguiled the weariness of his passage on board the 'Northumberland,' and at St. Helena he indulged in his game almost every day. The castle was the piece of which he made the most use. His nephew, Napoleon III., when in England, was considered a very skilful chess-player.

Paul I., Emperor of Russia, travelling as the Comte du Nord, visited the Café de la Régence at the hour of four in the afternoon, when the battles of the chess-board were at their height. Paul went up to a couple of combatants and betted on a difficult move. His stake was a louis. He won, took his money, and retired. Nothing hitherto had betrayed who he was, until the exclamation of the waiter, to whom he gave all his winnings, attracted the attention of the company. For this, and several other anecdotes, we are indebted to M. Jean Gay's learned and instructive 'Bibliographie du Jeu des Echecs.'

The following is stated to be of doubtful authority, which is a pity. One evening, when Robespierre, already surrounded with his halo of terror, was sitting in the Café de la Régence, a young little exquisite entered the saloon, and unceremoniously installing himself at his table, moved a man on the chess-board which stood in front of Robespierre, who responded to the move. The game went on, and was lost by the latter. They began a second game, which he likewise lost. Seeing this, Robespierre felt his honour engaged, and inquired for what stake they were playing. 'For the head of a man,' the lad replied. 'I have won it; give it me.' Robespierre drew from his pocket a sheet of paper, and wrote an order to set at liberty the Comte de R—, then

imprisoned in the Conciergerie. The smart little dandy, it seems, was no other than the Comte's affianced bride.

The excitement caused by chess is too much for many people's nerves to support with impunity. The Czar, John the Terrible, died in 1584, of an apoplectic fit, while playing chess with one of his courtiers. Lord Harvey, in No. 37 of the 'Craftsman,' says that, although chess is not usually played for a stake, nobody is indifferent about winning or losing; and that it is very rare for warm-tempered people ever to become good players. Olaus Magnus, Archbishop of Upsala, died 1560, holds that hidden tendencies to anger, impatience, vanity, avarice, and other failings, are brought out by the game of chess; and it is for that reason that the nobles of Gothland and Sweden, before bestowing their daughters in marriage, have the custom of trying, principally by chess, the temper of the suitors who present themselves. Some amateurs, of nervous constitution, cannot sleep after a hard-fought game; others, when the decisive move approaches, are seized with feverish agitation. Some are so impressed with the contest that, next day, they could go over every move again. Quintilian relates that Scævola, after losing a game of chess, started for the country. On the way he went over in his head every move that had been made in the game, and so discovered the error which had caused his defeat. He returned and found up his opponent, who acknowledged the perfect accuracy of his memory. As a precautionary measure, to keep their heads clear and their tempers cool, Carrera, in his 'Avvertimenti,' recommends chess-players to eat sparingly, and to take aperient medicine before setting to work in a serious contest.

Defeats at chess are not easily either forgotten or forgiven. Leonardo di Cutri was poisoned in Calabria, by a rival, at the age of forty-six, while on a visit to the Prince of Bisignano. A Spanish nobleman, who had for some time been in the habit of playing

with Phillip II., used to win every game. One day, when their chess-playing had terminated in the customary result, he perceived that the king was excessively annoyed. If the fact took him by surprise, his stock of common sense must have been but small. On reaching his home, he said to his family, 'My dear children, we may as well pack up and take ourselves off at once. This is no longer a place for us; for the king has fallen into a violent rage because he could not beat me at chess.'

Richer, monk of Senones, in the 'History of his Abbey,' relates that Ferraud, Count of Flanders, always illtreated his wife when she played chess with him and won. One sort of beating involved another. The battle of Bouvines (July 12, 1214) was a consequence of a game thus ungallantly concluded in which battle the Count was made prisoner, brought to Paris ironed hand and foot, and shut up in the tower of the Louvre. The Countess Jeanne (who was daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople, and ward of Philip Augustus) was consequently left to govern his dominions all her own way, and to have her quiet game of chess with a more amiable adversary.

One is unwilling to question King Canute's magnanimity, after his famous rebuke of his courtiers; but his mind seems to have been less proof against the excitements of chess than the blandishments of flattery. While playing with the Count Ulf, the king made a great mistake, in consequence of which the Count took one of his knights. The King would not allow this, but replaced the piece, insisting that the Count should make a different move. The latter got angry, upset the chessboard, and retired. 'Ulf,' shouted the King after him, 'you are a coward; you run away.'

The Count returned to the door, and answered, 'You would have run away into the River Helga, in very

different style, if I had not come to your assistance when the Swedes were beating you like a dog. You did not call me coward then.' With those words, he walked off; and the next day the King had him put to death.

An Italian village-priest was in the habit of playing with a neighbour who never would allow himself to be beaten, although he lost five games out of six. To convince him that such was really the case, the priest rang the alarm bell of his parsonage, summoning in that way his parishioners, to make them umpires of the dispute. As the same trick was frequently repeated, his flock got tired of the proceeding, and took no further notice of the summons.

One day his house did catch fire. The priest rang his alarm-bell in vain. Nobody came; and when he complained, he was told that people could not leave their household affairs for the sake of a trumpery game of chess. 'Alas!' he said, 'this time I played chess with the fire, and the fire has checkmated me.'

The jealousies excited by chess have often been accompanied by mystery. The president Nicolai, who passed for the best chess-player of his time in France, was one day visited by a stranger who had travelled sixty leagues (a considerable distance then) to challenge him. The chessboard was brought, and Nicolai was beaten. The unknown victor would neither play a second game nor make known who he was.

Finally, monkeys have been trained to play chess—doubtless, in the same way as learned pigs have been taught to spell. The creature, obeying an imperceptible signal from his master, made the indicated move. The animal was really no more than what the artificial Turk of the chess automaton was to the human player concealed beneath it.

E. S. D.



OUR BENEFIT SOCIETY.

THE Loyal United Order of Odd Friends, to which I belong, is one of the most extensive benefit societies in England. Its forty lodges are spread through London, and its members may be reckoned as numbering fifty thousand at least. Of course there are fat lodges and lean lodges. Ours is a fat lodge. We are four thousand strong, and besides money in hand, have three thousand pounds out at interest.

The Loyal United Order of Odd Friends is not an enrolled society. We have submitted our laws and regulations to Mr. Tidd Pratt, we have shown him our balance-sheets from quarter to quarter through several years, and that we have been growing richer and richer, at the rate of a hundred and fifty pounds per annum, but that does not stir him from his conviction that our system is a rotten one, our laws imperfect, and our subscriptions utterly inadequate to meet current expenses. His 'tables,' which are infallible, prove this, so of course there is no use in saying anything further on the subject.

We pay threepence-halfpenny a week, and for this we receive ten shillings a week in sickness, ten pounds at death, five pounds at wife's death, five pounds in case of fire. We can pay this, and we do pay it, and as I said before, save money over all. For twenty years and more, and in defiance of the registrar and his tables, in defiance of all recognised laws of economy and proper government, we have flourished and are still flourishing.

I am generally known as a 'crabby' member, and a happy thing it would be for our order and many another I could mention, if it counted amongst its members a few more of the 'crabby' sort—men who will not take the secretary's word for as good as gospel, and have a knack of carrying a slip of paper and a bit of black-lead pencil at financial discussions. I am a working man myself, but I must say that the way in which working men conduct themselves at these meetings is most

humiliating. They have no voice at all. A hundred and fifty or two hundred will meet in the club-room, and the four or five regular spouters will spout, no matter what about, expelling this member or re-admitting that, presenting a testimonial to this man or increasing the salary of another; and the members cry 'hear, hear,' just as they know is expected of them, and vote away their money, leaping like a flock of sheep over any stick the reigning clique choose to hold out. I have mixed a good deal in these meetings, and can vouch for the remarkable fact that while the working man will lose entire days to attend Chartist demonstrations, and support with might and main, and no inconsiderable portion of his pocket-money, 'universal suffrage' and the right of the carpenter and the tanner and the shoemaker to sit rough-handed and in the costume of their craft in the British House of Commons as representatives of their brethren, his own personal affairs may go to ruin for want of the commonest care and attention. See him in his club-room, where equality prevails, and there are no bloated aristocrats to badger, and what sort of a hand is he at 'legislation'? He is as stupid as an owl and as mute as a fish. He sits and smokes his pipe and drinks his beer while the men at the desk are busy at the figure columns, and when the chairman at the close of 'business' rises to report, he can't hear for the noise of men yawning, and the gathering of pots for replenishing, everybody being so very anxious to hear the words 'I declare this lodge closed; give your minds to harmony, gentlemen.' It is strange that he should take more interest in 'the affairs of his country' than in what so immediately concerns him—in the safety of his sick pay and the wherewithal to bury him decently when death claps a hand on him; but so it is; beyond crying 'hear, hear,' and rattling a pot against a table in satisfaction at seeing a speaker sit down, or holding up his hand when the clique chair-

man cries, 'All you who are of opinion,' &c., he evinces no sort of concern.

That is to say, he is a dumb dog so long as matters go swimmingly, and the bell-wethers carry their way; but let any one dare raise a voice in opposition to these gentry! Goodness save your ear-drums from the roaring of the British lion then! I remember in the year 1857 opposing a vote for a new banner. Banners are expensive things, and I happen to be of opinion that it is possible for a body of men to maintain their dignity without the aid of gilt poles and painted canvas and lace and tinsel and such like Bartlemy fair tawdry. My opinions on the matter were combated with rather more force than delicacy. It was hinted that if the motion had been that every member of — Lodge should appear on next Sunday week with a new pair of Wellingtons, I should not have cut up quite so rough about it. The old banner was unfurled and displayed on the platform before the eyes of the members, and without doubt its abrasions and gashes and rents (some of them suspiciously clean cut and recent looking) were more eloquent than anything that had been previously urged. It was quite unnecessary for P. P. G. M. R. Cockboat to wave it in the manner he did, and deliver himself of that terribly powerful speech concerning banners and flags generally, and that one which 'had braved a thousand years,' &c., in particular. It was the generally expressed opinion of the members assembled that I was a disagreeable flint-skinner, and the motion was carried triumphantly.

The subject chosen for the new banner (the old one exhibited the fattened calf scene in the parable of the Prodigal Son) was the Good Samaritan, and Past Grand Special President Dyer, an artist well known in the neighbourhood, was proposed as a fit and proper person to undertake the job. P. G. S. P. Dyer was not a bad sort of fellow, and cheerfully accepted the commission. At the expiration of seven weeks he brought home the banner, and presented a little bill of forty-

three pounds for the same. The members at first appeared to think this rather high, but on the new banner being unrolled and exposed to view, their murmuring instantly gave place to universal exclamations of admiration. I don't myself profess to be a judge of paintings, but I didn't much like this one. To my eye the publican on the other side of the way need not have worn his nose at such a cock, nor, with his skirts held up, been made to look so much like an old lady picking her way across a miry road. If I had painted it, I should not have thought it necessary to have made such a tremendous hole in the wounded man's side, although, to be sure, the oil-can the Good Samaritan carried was capable of containing enough to have filled the hole several times. I think, too, that I should not have given to the Samaritan's donkey quite such a heart-broken expression of countenance. However, it was a nice shiny picture, and the fringe it was edged with was lovely. I flatter myself that few men could have stood the roasting I came in for that night. But I had my revenge. Less than a month after the Amalgamated Cordwainers borrowed our new banner to show off at a benefit they took at the Victoria Theatre (we oblige each other in these little matters). It was a miscellaneous sort of entertainment, including a 'clog hornpipe,' which, however, did not take place till late in the evening, and after a large quantity of gin and beer had been consumed in the green-room. Whether this had anything to do with the catastrophe I don't know, but it somehow happened that the clog hornpipe was performed on the new banner spread on the floor carpet wise, and that it was returned to us with the publican and the Samaritan and the wounded man and the donkey all so terribly battered and bruised and dented with hobnails, that only for the fringe we should never have recognized our banner at all. It was supposed to have been sent to P. G. S. P. Dyer's for repair, but we haven't seen it since. After all, however, this was an accident, and perhaps it was not quite

fair in me to rasp them about it as I did. Besides, it is not as though—since I am ‘crabby’—I need go out of my way to find matter for grumbling. As a member of the L. U. O. F., I cannot lift my eyes without finding it.

Take the lodge houses to start with, and the parent lodge (that is the first founded lodge of the order) first of all. This is situated in a remote part of the east of London, about as awkward a part to approach from either of the remaining three quarters of the metropolis as can be well imagined. Without going into particulars, I may state that several times in the course of the year certain business is transacted at this lodge which calls for the presence of every L. U. O. F. in the order. The house is a slummy little concern, but, as may be easily imagined under such circumstances, does a wonderfully good business; and it is likely to continue it, not, you may depend, on account of the good-will of the members who have to walk some of them six or seven miles to attend, or club together, and hire a van, which is very commonly done, but because they are helpless to alter the state of affairs. That is to say, they are helpless from a working man's point of view. Any member may propose the removal of the parent lodge to a more central position, but it will cost him the greater part of a week's earnings to do so, for, says the rules, ‘Any member proposing the removal of the parent lodge shall be fined one guinea.’ Just fancy fifty thousand free Englishmen knuckling under to such twopenny tyranny as this!

Take lodge houses generally. They are one and all public-houses, and the landlords are one and all treasurers. Not of all the stock money, it is true, but of a great deal too much of it. I must, however, do the publican the justice to state that the profits out of the lodge held at his house are not very tremendous. All that is paid for rent of room and gas is seven and sixpence a quarter, and the established price for a pint of beer, brought upstairs by the waiter, is twopence farthing instead of twopence, which is the

bar-price. The chief fault, in my opinion, to be found with the system is, that the lodge house is generally a hole-and-corner ‘public,’ up a narrow alley or court in a disgustingly low, gin-drinking neighbourhood. This is the case with the best attended lodge of our order. To reach it you have to thread your way through a roaring gas-flaring costermonger's market-way, until you come to a dark, ugly, and nasty archway into which you turn, and, guided by a blinking gas-lamp in the distance, presently arrive at —, No. — Lodge, with its bar full of drunken and quarrelsome barrow-men and fish-fags. The lodge-room upstairs is a very decent one when you have got to it, and many a score do get to it every lodge night; but my crabbiness leads me to say, ‘Why should we, as decent working men, content ourselves with being hatched-up in this nasty place? What sense is there in coming here and sitting for hours in a neighbourhood ripe for fever and any other disease that grows out of dirt and squalor, on pretence that we are providing against sickness?’ But it is of no use. As soon as you open your mouth, the landlord's friends and the secretaries' friends, and the select half-a-dozen who are drinking gin and water with the chairman, begin to groan and hiss, and you are beaten down to your seat again. I have the list of lodge houses before me at this instant, and out of the forty-three over twenty are of the sort above described. Some few of them are worse. There is one near Cloth Fair, Smithfield, that is, and another in the vicinity of Hoxton Square that caps even this.

Another matter over which the L. U. O. F. and myself disagree is as to their manner of paying their officers. There are the secretaries. Our lodge numbers four thousand members, and two secretaries are attached to it. The secretaries receive as payment for their services the sum of fourpence per quarter per member. These services consist in attending the weekly lodge meeting, addressing the quarterly ‘notices’ to the members, signing sick papers, and a few other duties

which might very well be performed by one intelligent man, and I should say at considerably less than *two hundred and sixty pounds per annum*.

But this is how they waste their money. Here is another L. U. O. F. law which I could not bring myself to regard with complacency, though I lived to be as old as Methuselah. As the stock-money increases, it is put out at interest to different brewers and distillers, who allow five per cent. interest for it. It frequently happens that as little as five-and-twenty pounds have to be disposed of. One would think that since there are two secretaries, not over-worked, one of them might find time to take a gentle walk as far as Mile End or Westminster; or, if he objected to walking, he might take a fourpenny omnibus. A tolerably cheap and quite secure way would be to post the amount in money orders (with separate letter of advice) in two registered letters. But among the L. U. O. F. this would be out of order. According to these rules, the twenty-five pounds must be carried by *three men*, respectable and trustworthy members, who, in consideration of their losing half a day's work in the performance of the duty, are allowed *half-a-crown each*, which altogether amounts to a sum considerably more than Messrs. Meux or Charrington allow for the use of the deposit for *three months*. This is a bad law every way. Not only do the funds suffer, but, instead of a benefit, a positive loss is inflicted on the three members. It is not the half day but the *whole* day that is lost; and as it is considered the proper thing for them to call at a lodge house on the road and have a bit of dinner, &c., it occasionally happens that a trifle more than half-a-crown will be expended, and the three trusty members find that the reward for resisting the tremendous temptation to divide the five-and-twenty pounds amongst them and emigrate to a foreign land, consists in a tipsy headache and the loss of a day's wages.

The greatest piece of cobbling work of all, however, is the L.U.O.F. laws that apply to the prime design

of the order—the relief of the sick. To start with, the doctor is a taboed individual in the management of this branch of their business. The prospectus of the club says that thoroughly sound and healthy men only are eligible for admission; and when a new member has paid his entrance-fee, and belonged to the society for a period of six months, he is called on to appear at the lodge on a certain evening, to be examined as to the state of his health. But by whom is he examined? In a prosperous lodge such as ours, it generally happens that from thirty to fifty men, between eighteen and forty years of age, assemble to submit to the inquisition which is to decide their fate as L. U. O. F. They are gathered in a half-circle like charity boys on 'examination day,' and the inquisitors sit in a row at the end. They usually number eight or nine, and consist of the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, &c. &c. Being, as a rule, little tradesmen in the neighbourhood, most of them have served on coroners' juries; and it is easy to perceive that the recollection of that fact regulates their behaviour. It is good to see their profound airs, and the knowing winks and nudging amongst themselves, while they are cross-questioning a timid applicant for admission into the noble order. As I write, I have in my eye a pigeon-fancying bootmaker, who is a rare hand as a balloting committee man.

'William Brown,' calls out the balloting chairman.

'Here,' answers W. B., who is one of the half-circle.

'What trade are you?'

'Baker, sir.'

'Married?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Wife alive?'

'Oh, yes, sir.'

'What's the state of your health, Mr. Brown?'

'First class, sir.'

'Wife's health?'

'Ditto, sir.'

'Never had gout, rheumatism, or anything amiss with your lungs?'

'Never, to my knowledge, sir.'

'You then consider yourself a sound man?'

'Sound as a perch, sir.'

After this there is a pause, and the balloting committee fix their eyes on William Brown, and stare at him as hard as ever they can. At last, up starts the pigeon-fancying bootmaker.

'What are those spots on your face?' asks he.

'Spots, sir! oh, ah; small-pox, sir; pits, don't you know?'

'And don't you call having small-pox being ill?'

'Rather,' replies Mr. Brown, grinning.

'Then what did you mean by telling us that you were never ill to your knowledge?'

'Because when I had it I didn't have no knowledge. I was only a bobby at that time.'

'Umph. What makes you wear that thick comforter round your throat?'

'Oh, I don't know, sir; fancy.'

'Not because you are tender in that part, eh? Would you mind pulling it off?'

'Well, if you *must* know, I've got a little bile on the back of my neck, and I *would* mind pulling it off.'

'To be sure you would,' exclaims the pigeon-fancying shoemaker, triumphantly. 'Gentlemen, if you ask my opinion, I say that a man who will prevaricate about a little bile, would not scruple to do so over a asthma or a galloping consumption.'

'But I've heard that boils are healthy,' mildly suggests the chairman.

'Hear hear,' from the majority of the committee.

'Well, please yourselves; I've warned you, remember,' remarks the shoemaker.

'All you who are in favour of William Brown's admission, signify the same in the usual manner,' says the chairman; and the majority being so disposed, the baker is duly admitted.

We will suppose that in course of time Mr. Brown falls ill, and thinks he would like to have his sick pay from the club, and sends word to that effect to the secretary. He

doesn't send any medical certificate with the message, but merely an intimation that he is too ill to work, and shall be glad to be put on the books at once. On receiving this message the secretary sends word to two members who happen to live within two miles of the sick man, to visit him at least twice a week during his illness, between the hours of 6 A.M. and 9 P.M. A 'sick list' is sent to Brown's house, and this the visitors are bound to sign every time they call, or Brown won't get any money.

This is supposed to be ample security against cheating on Brown's part; but is it so? The visitors find Brown abed with his nightcap on, and where is the man that looks well under such circumstances? They say, 'How are you to-day, friend?' and the friend wags his head and says 'very bad.' There is no more questioning or answering, the visitor signs the paper and gladly hurries out of the sick room. If Brown is an impostor, he can keep this game going for a quarter of a year; and at an expense of thirteen pence per week he can belong to four clubs, and draw a comfortable two pounds every Saturday. I admit that in cases of suspicion the secretary is privileged to send a doctor to the sick man to examine him, and the rarity of his exercising this privilege may be urged in favour of the supposition that the L. U. O. F. are far too honourable to be guilty of what, in the army, is known as 'malingering.' This may be true, and doubtless is true, as a rule; but when one considers how few a number of exceptions to the rule involve a waste of hundreds of pounds in the course of a single year, it seems—at least it does to my crabbed mind—that a little more precaution is advisable.

There, too, is another loose screw in the L. U. O. F. sick benefit system. No matter the nature of a sick man's disease, the 'visitor' appointed by the secretary is bound in penalties to perform his duty. The penalties are, 'for neglecting to visit within twenty-four hours after receiving notice, one shilling;

for declining to stand as visitor, one shilling; for every ensuing case of neglect, one shilling,' and this, though the patient be lying ill of small-pox or typhus fever, or some such virulent contagious disease.

Did space permit there are many other faulty places in the L. U. O. F. that I would like to pick into holes,

that they might be decently repaired. I should the more like to do so because my experience warrants me in declaring that there is scarcely a benefit society in England that is free from all the charges which might be brought against the L. U. O. F.

J. G.

LITTLE DINNERS.

'LITTLE Dinners!' I hear some one say in a tone of contempt as he turns over these pages; what can be the use of them? 'Little Dinners!' What can be the good of writing about them? Anybody can give 'a little dinner.' Pardon me, dear reader, that is precisely what I deny. As to their 'use,' that is altogether another consideration. The 'splendid banquet' given by the Duke of M—, or the 'large circle entertained' by the Earl of K—, may be far more useful as far as the cook, the butcher, the confectioner, and the grocer are concerned, nay, possibly, to Belgravian mothers, though their fair daughters are more frequently than not excluded from them. But I cannot take such a utilitarian view of what should be the most agreeable hour of the day; and I contend that 'little dinners' may be all that is pleasant, refined, and even *recherché*, with a small amount of trouble and expense, if the art of giving them is perfectly understood; while with every possible pains it is difficult not to make a large dinner, what it is universally allowed to be, a nuisance.

So many things are of importance in order to make a 'little dinner' perfectly successful, that it may be well to enumerate a few of them.

In the first place the number should never exceed ten; eight would be better, and six best of all, for in so small a party the conversation must be general; and it is not easy to find more than six people who are likely to be long interested in the same subject. In the selection of these, great care and judg-

ment, and often considerable tact, are required. Every individual cannot be equally gifted, but all should be capable of appreciating wit and talent. Indeed, good listeners are as essential as clever talkers, and the faculty of drawing out the powers of others is by no means common. Many good stories have been told of clever men who always insisted on engrossing the conversation; and we remember one who could not conceal his resentment if any one dared to interfere with his monopoly. Still society is, upon the whole, indebted to such men, so few can converse agreeably or well.

Generally speaking, to intrust the success of a dinner to a single person is to insure a certain failure; for most people are too impatient to put themselves, even for a few hours, in the mental attitude in which Boswell lived with regard to Johnson. 'Le secret d'ennuyer est celui de tout dire.' If 'tout' were changed to 'trop' the saying would be equally true, for the man who 'trades upon his conversation' is never an entirely agreeable man. His 'potted stories' come gradually to be looked for with dread, and his eternal 'that reminds me,' and 'à propos of what you were saying,' falls on the ears of his unwilling auditors like a wet blanket, as they prepare themselves with a patient smile for the penance they know that they must undergo.

Addison compares 'talents in discourse' to different kinds of music, and suggests that the several conversable parts of mankind might cast into proper characters and be

divisions as they resemble several instruments that are in use among the masters of harmony. He is ingenious in adapting each instrument to the style of conversation it is supposed to resemble. For instance, the noise and emptiness of a drum is compared to 'a blusterer in conversation without either wit, humour, or good breeding,' though well fitted 'to impose upon the ignorant;' but a lute, which he describes as exactly opposite in character to a drum, he says, 'sounds finely by itself; its notes are exquisitely sweet and low, and easily drowned in a multitude of instruments. It is seldom heard in a company of more than five, whereas a drum will show to advantage in a company of five hundred;' and he adds that 'conversation is never so confined or straitened as in numerous assemblies;' so that if we consider dinner only as a pleasant *réunion* and the easiest mode of social intercourse, a small dinner is incomparably more agreeable than a large one.

But as the idea of dinner is more suggestive of cookery than of conversation, we may be expected to make known some new development in the science of gastronomy—for a science it undoubtedly is, and one that the generality of mankind can ill afford to despise. 'La diète des alimens nous rend la santé du corps, et la diète des hommes la tranquillité de l'âme.' The first of these propositions is certainly true. We have the highest medical authority for asserting that almost all disease originates in derangement of the digestive organs. If these happen to be weak, their well-doing must depend upon the easiness of the work given them to do; if strong, their vigour will soon become impaired by being overtaxed. We are not so much affected by the quality of our food, as by the way in which it is dressed; and this is one reason why little dinners are difficult to devise. It requires some cleverness to do this really well.

The first thing necessary is a total absence of *pretension*; and the arrangement of the table should be as simple as possible. Glass and china are in themselves prettier

and far better suited to a 'little dinner' than a massive *epargne* and silver dishes. If the linen is not of the finest, at all events it can be snowy white and thoroughly dry: we have sat through a dinner in constant fear of rheumatism from a damp napkin; the plate well cleaned; the roses and scarlet geraniums in the white Dresden china baskets tastefully arranged. Even the shape and size of the decanters and wine-glasses make a great difference in the appearance of a dinner-table.

With ample materials and a well-filled purse, it is comparatively easy to write a bill of fare suited to sixteen or twenty people, when it is no matter if a dish costs thirteen pounds or more, which we remember to have heard was the price of one dish of peaches at a house where we occasionally dine. Besides this, the variety necessary in a large dinner makes it far less difficult than, with limited means and a refined taste, to contrive a 'little dinner' that shall be *appétissant*, where the small, well-roasted joint, the few nicely-done cutlets, the clear soup, all give evidence of a clean kitchen and a cook who does not consider it beneath her dignity to bestow care upon the smaller details of a dinner—upon the boiling of the vegetables, the mashed potatoes and melted butter, which are the best tests of careful cooking. A particular old lady always said to her cook when she engaged her, 'All I care for is a hot dinner. Hot water one may drink, but one cannot drink cold soup.'

It requires some amount of practical knowledge for a small dinner to be sent up perfectly; but if it is, it is far wholesomer as well as better than the lukewarm greasy dinner, full of pretension, dressed by the second-rate cook hired for the occasion, who, secure in his ignorance and conceit, cares little whether his dinner is really good or not. It suits its purpose and serves his; and what else matters to him? In most instances the plain cook in the house would have done far better; for if the foundation of cooking is well laid, it is very easy to

improve upon it, and she, caring for her own credit, would have spared no pains, and would have done far better. We have frequently heard it said by one who well understood the art of giving dinners, that the secret of a well-arranged bill of fare lay in not ordering too much, which is an almost invariable fault. This has been in a great degree obviated of late by the prevailing custom of dining *à la Russe*, which has further advantages in the decoration of the dinner-table, which can now be made as bright as flowers and fruit can make it; in its being no longer necessary for servants to reach across the table to remove the side dishes for 'handing round;' in the absence of the large unsightly joint; and in the fact that a smaller amount of dinner suffices. We no longer depend upon the *pièce de résistance* for our dinner. The prejudice against made dishes is disappearing rapidly. Most of us are convinced of the mistake we made when we submitted to be dieted *à la Jephson*, and believed the everlasting mutton chop to be the panacea for all the ills of indigestion, as it is now generally admitted that dishes in which half the work of mastication is done, suit a weak digestion far better than the solid and 'wholesome' piece of roast mutton. The great difficulty in dining *à la Russe* is, that it involves the necessity of good waiting; but it is one more in idea than reality, for in a dinner of six or eight people, the amount of attendance required is not much, and it is then not necessary to have the servants in the room the whole of the time; they may be within call of a small bell placed on the table near the host. Every one is conscious how much more free and agreeable conversation becomes as soon as the restraint which the presence of servants necessarily entails is removed. We have seen such a dinner very nicely and quietly managed in a small *ménage* by an efficient man servant, assisted by the housemaid, who moved about noiselessly in the neatest possible attire.

As to bills of fare, it seems useless to suggest any, when all of

our readers can refer to Francatelli's admirable book, where they may find a variety suited to every month in the year, for any number of persons. But for the sake of those who may not have the book at hand, we will copy the bill of fare that is given for six or eight people in the month of January, at page 466:—

FIRST COURSE.

Julienne soup.
Sole au gratin.

1. *Remove.*

Braised leg of mutton *à la Provençale*.

2. *Entrées.*

Salmis of partridge with mushrooms.
Boudices of fowl *à la Pompadour*.

SECOND COURSE.

Roast wild duck.
Dressed spinach.
Soufflé pudding.
Apple Charlotte.

If this should be thought too artistic for our 'plain cook,' fillets of soles, which are perfectly easy to do and quite as good, might be substituted for 'soles au gratin;' clear gravy soup for 'Julienne soup;' a simple fricassée of chicken for 'boudices of fowl,' and stewed partridge with *soubise* (onion) sauce or celery sauce, for the 'salmis of partridge.'

Any cook with a moderate amount of practical knowledge would be quite capable of sending up such a dinner as this, and in their season, venison and grouse might take the place of mutton, beef, and poultry.

A gentleman once said in our hearing that he had been dining at a friend's, who had given him 'such a handsome dinner.' 'A handsome dinner!' What could he mean? It was soon explained. He had had a sirloin of beef weighing twenty pounds! A monster joint! the sight of which would be enough to take away the appetite of any ordinary man. We shudder to think of it, and we confess to experiencing a somewhat similar shock when it is a question of going out to dinner in the country.

To leave our snug fireside, the last new book, our own 'little dinner,' for what? We have time for dismal anticipations during the dreary six miles' drive, and we can picture our dinner so vividly beforehand. The table made for ten

or twelve people laid for sixteen; the boiled milk and vermicelli we shall have for white soup; the flabby turbot; the everlasting saddle of mutton, chickens and tongue; the thick clumsy cutlets, and the small hard black balls, dignified by the name of 'rissoles'; and, if near Christmas, the never-failing roast beef and boiled turkey; the bustling waiters, in greasy black coats and white cotton gloves, pressing us to drink the dark fiery sherry and acid claret. Champagne we ever eschew under such circumstances. Bad wine is a greater infliction, and more immediately pernicious in its consequences than bad cooking.

We remember dining once at a princely mansion, where economy was carried to great perfection; and hearing the noble host urge a shy, unhappy-looking curate to drink some sweet wine, 'Thank you, my lord, but I never touch sweet wine.' 'Ah then,' was the instant rejoinder, 'this wine will suit you exactly, for it has lost its sweetness.' Notwithstanding his bashfulness, the parson had strength of mind to decline the vinegar so kindly offered to him.

Perhaps it is the time consumed by a dinner in the country that makes it so insufferably tedious. In London every one dines at eight, and the guests leave soon after ten. In the country people dine at six and half-past six, rarely so late as at seven, so that the whole process, including the *trajet*, takes at least seven hours—a considerable length of time to be offered up at the shrine of friendship!

Notwithstanding our cold manner, we are a warmhearted people, and capable of heroic acts of self-sacrifice and generosity; but we are also more devoted to our comforts than any nation in the world. To be deprived of them in this gloomy climate, and where there is so little in the external world to make us light-hearted, is a serious trial. We are all conscious of the difference in our spirits when we set off to pay a visit to A. or B. Though A. is a charming companion, and one of our greatest friends (we are

only too happy to receive him at our own house or to meet him anywhere but at his own), and his wife a beautiful and accomplished woman, still their *ménage* is so uncomfortable, their rooms so badly furnished, their servants so slovenly and unpunctual, and, above all, their dinners so bad, that we feel as if we were deliberately doing something to injure our health in going to visit them; and when our annual purgatory is over, we turn our faces homeward with thankfulness that *that* is done, and that we are none the worse, and we go on to visit B., a tiresome prosy man with a sick uninteresting wife; but we go with a distinct feeling of relief. We know that we shall have to draw largely upon our own resources for amusement; still, as we have brought some books from Mudie's, we hope to derive benefit from the country air, the good food, and the regular hours of B.'s household. We expect that the improvement in our health and spirits will compensate for the dullness of the house and its inmates. His 'little dinners,' too, are perfection, quite a study in themselves, especially as we know him to be too prudent and methodical a man to incur the smallest unnecessary expense.

The size and shape of our dinner-table makes a considerable difference both in our comfort and in the appearance of our dinner. Many years ago there was a perfect rage for round dinner-tables. This was a great mistake for a large party, and it was soon discovered to be so. For a small dinner they are the best, but they should never be used for more than eight people. In a large mixed party they bring every one so much *en évidence*, that they are far from pleasant, and often anything but desirable.

There is yet another point upon which we must touch, and a difficult point it is. We refer to the question of lighting. In the first place, let it be granted that the light should be above us, and not on the table. There is nothing so good, so gentlemanlike as wax candles; but they must be fixed either in a chandelier, or in a monster centre-

piece, raising them up above our heads, and the expense of such a display of wax candles would not be suited to our 'little dinners.' Gas is detestable; the light unbecoming, the glare painful, and the heat oppressive.

We have seen nothing to compare with a moderator lamp, most artistically arranged within a china ball of graceful proportions suspended from the ceiling, and surrounded by a large china shade which throws the light upon the table in the most pleasing manner. These lamps are to be found at Miller's, in Piccadilly, opposite the Burlington Arcade, and we think them perfection. They give the right amount of light for the table; and the sideboard or chimney-piece can supply additional light for the room if more is required.

But no one who has not tried them can tell their charm, or how much the beauty of the flowers is enhanced by the strong light reflected upon them by means of the china shade. Their bright and glowing colours, combined with the glistening of the well-cleaned glass with which the table should be well supplied, imparts so gay and brilliant an appearance, that we infinitely prefer it to the comparatively sombre magnificence, which we have so often witnessed, of tables groan-

ing beneath the weight of massive plate.

We believe the idea, or its adaptation, to be French. Of course they are made in various colours and of different shapes; we have seen even a pale sea-green lamp, and the effect of it was perfect. We have no hesitation in recommending our readers to try them.

The cost of a little dinner is so trifling, that, as men's lives are mostly ruled by considerations about money, this alone is of no small importance. But there are other points which weigh with us. The pleasant hours of life are so few and far between, the disagreeable things that must be done, as positive duties, so many, that we confess to a feeling of impatience when 'the claims of society' are urged upon us as an excuse for such insufferable tedium as a large dinner-party; and if we are able to induce any of our readers to exchange its long, dull formality for easy and pleasant intercourse, by which acquaintance ripens into life-long friendship between those whose tastes are congenial, and shall have induced any to look upon a 'little dinner' as rest and refreshment after the harass and fatigue of the day, instead of a further tax upon their powers of endurance, we shall *and feel* that we have accomplished our *task*.

C. T.



IN THE BUSH WITH THE BUSHRANGERS.*

I THINK I mentioned, when describing, as requested, some of my adventures in the corps of Mounted Police, that the rangers do not join in the pursuit of the bushrangers, as they have quite enough to do to look after the natives. Knowing this, and feeling desirous of entering a regular government police corps, I exchanged into the — Mounted Police, whose sole duty it was to track the bushrangers and bring them to justice. This promised more excitement than the comparatively humdrum life of a black hunter, and I was delighted with the prospect, while the man with whom I exchanged seemed very pleased to have an opportunity of a little lighter work. There is no mistake about the danger of the work: I can scarcely imagine anything much more hazardous. It is almost difficult to believe that they are men, with whom these police have to do—they are so often more like fiends. I will presently describe a bushranger proper, but I must first say a few words about the police.

As is the case in many foreign corps, the men are nearly all gentlemen by birth and education; this may seem strange, but so it is. I remember one remarkable individual whose name was never known: he had been a clergyman of the Church of England, but in his costume of bush hunter you would hardly imagine it. As there was a living in the family, his father determined to bring him up to the church. So he went in for Hebrew and Divinity and the Fathers, spending half his time in boxing and rowing and drinking. The ancient fathers were at times half drowned in beer, and again warmed up and dried with the best negro head. When the time for examination drew near, our friend came up to London—went in, and during the time of decision he devoured a good portion of Pimm's lobsters, and Evans's kidneys, and went about as if he were the jolliest dog alive. A

day after the examination, he pawned his books, bought an immense supply of his favourite weed, and took passage for Australia; there he enlisted as a man hunter, and when I joined the corps he had been in it some six years, and had greatly distinguished himself as a shot. His aim was known to be so true that the bushrangers grew afraid, and whenever it was known that the 'bishop' was on the trail, they knew they were dead men.

The duties of a bush hunter do not necessitate his always being in the bush, as the rangers are, for he is never in the bush unless on the track of some offender. The headquarters are in the chief town of the colony, so that he sees a little of town life, that is, colonial town life, such as it is.

The theatre, which holds perhaps a hundred people, is a favourite resort. The pit folks always carry in with them to the performance a huge jar of beer or cider, with which they regale themselves during the evening. Beyond a great many public-houses, there is no other place of resort save the theatre, in most of the small provincial chief towns, so that it is a hard matter sometimes to find out amusement. But the bush hunters are never long without work. Every day is sure to bring news of some fresh offender, or of some recent outrage of some old and well-known offender.

Bushrangers, as well as other people, have their living to get, and though they do it in a very uncivilized way, yet they are very business-like. As there is now telegraphic communication between most of the chief towns out here, news of any fresh 'business' travels quickly, and almost ere the deed is done the police are on the offenders' track. The bushrangers are indeed a most formidable set of men to have anything to do with. Some of them are disappointed traders, who, through many reverses, have been driven to seek desperate means of subsistence;

* See 'London Society' for November, p. 446.

others are gold seekers who have been unsuccessful in their work, and who have discovered that the simplest and easiest way of getting gold is to relieve other people of it.

But by far the most dangerous and vicious portion of the community of bushrangers is made up of escaped convicts. These are, as a rule, reckless, desperate, and abandoned men; who will not shrink from committing a murder if they only think that there is a chance of even a nugget. Their motto seems to be 'kill,' and they always carry it out. In dealing with such desperate characters, necessarily some circumspection is required; consequently they are always hunted and captured by a number. They exist in large bands all over the colony, but they are in greater numbers at and around the gold fields; while if hard pressed they will visit the townships and plunder and kill.

They usually choose to come to a town when they know that the police are away on the track of some offender—most likely an associate. But the places which they prefer to visit are the farmhouses which are entirely away from any town or village. Here they can do more as they like, and be well fed into the bargain, for bushrangers, next to a good booty, like a good meal; and wherever they go, they will endeavour to get a good 'feed,' and they generally carry off all the portable provisions that they can lay hands on. I was once out far in the bush, before I had entered the police corps, and had taken refuge from a storm at a large farmhouse. I rode up in the thick black night, and my arrival was the signal for a tremendous outburst from the dogs—for no farmer in the bush is without his dogs—they are better than locks and bars. Presently the door opened, and a rough voice asked, in no very polite manner, who I was and what I wanted. I replied that I had lost my way and wanted shelter. 'Are you alone?' asked the voice. On my replying, a man armed with a gun made his appearance, and when he saw me he burst into a fit of laughter: 'By—, lad, but I gave you a rough greeting; I thought it might be

some cursed bushrangers, they have been so cunning lately!' I went in and was soon seated by a roaring fire, and pegging away at excellent bacon, which I washed down with capital bush beer. While we were in the midst of supper we heard a voice crying out, outside the door. Old Jeff Haynes, the farmer, went to the door: but the moment he put his bald old head outside a sack was thrown over him and down he fell spitting out a curse, and three immense fellows walked in. They were of the regular bushranger type, dressed as prospectors, in top boots, green coats, and large leather hats: they all carried revolvers and bowies. The women began to scream. 'Don't disturb yourselves ladies, pray,' said the one who appeared to be the captain, 'we have not come for anything to night but a little of your fat bacon and good old ale. Sit down, comrades.' The two bearded fellows took chairs and drew them to the fire. They let old Jeff out of his sack and he was obliged to be quiet, for he knew that if the slightest resistance were made, they would all be shot down like dogs. So we all had to laugh and pretend to be merry, while inwardly shuddering, for we recognized in the captain a man whose name was all over the colony as the most brutal and bloodthirsty of the Sydney gang. He was a remarkable character, evidently a gentleman by education, and indeed rumour made him out a person of title. He had a most fascinating manner; literally speaking, whatever he suggested you doing, you felt you must obey. He was courteous to the women, and treated them as if they had been duchesses. But under all this gallantry and snavity, there was a wolf's nature and ferocity. The men proceeded leisurely to enjoy themselves, and after a while became rather under the influence of the spirits and beer of which they had partaken.

'Now,' said the leader, 'let us proceed to business. Farmer, we'll trouble you for the notes you received this morning for the flock of black lambs at Sydney.'

'I've paid it in,' said old Jeff, trembling.

'By — then you must write us an order on the bankers, old skin-flint,' said the captain.

'That would be of no use,' said the farmer, 'as I always pay and receive the money myself, and they won't pay to any one else.'

The captain swore by everything that he must have the money, and ordered Haynes to start with him at once and draw.

'But,' said Jeff, 'they know you pretty well down there, so there's a chance of ill-luck!'

This the captain had forgotten, and he saw that he was done. 'Well then,' said he, 'we must see what you have in the house.' And forthwith a general rummaging commenced: the house was searched from top to bottom, and every article of the least value was seized and crammed into a large box which the robbers had brought with them.

Meanwhile Mrs. Haynes had despatched the maid-servant to the stockman's hut, and gave her a message for him: 'Robbers are in the house—go to the next farm, bring all the men.' The girl went out by a back door, unnoticed by the bushrangers, who were too busily engaged in their search to observe. They kept drinking hard, too, at the spirits, which made them mad with boisterous mirth. Shivering little Sally ran on quickly to the stockman's hut, and told him how the robbers were in the house, and he rapidly saddled his horse and rode off for help. The bushmen had now finished their search, having stripped the house, and were calling for more liquor; they had, too, thrown down their firearms, of which I took note. They were very loud and boisterous, and began to sing songs, and called upon us all for a song in return. Singing to these scoundrels was far from a congenial employment, but we dared not refuse. In the midst of their mirth, I heard horses' hoofs in the distance, and noted them quietly reining up, and during a deafening chorus to some rough song, the troop, with stockman True at their head, burst in.

'Done, by——!' shouted the captain, making for his pistols; but I had been too quick for him and had

seized them, at the first surprise. The robbers seized their knives and rushed to make their escape; as the captain turned a shot struck him in the leg, and he fell. The others gained the door, but were met on the outside by the men, who shot them down. The whole thing took place in a few minutes, and the revulsion of feeling on being rescued, when but a moment before death had threatened us, was great. The captain was only wounded: he lay cursing and swearing in his blood. As I had some experience in doctoring, I bound up his wound, and we took him at once to Sydney. The best of it was—on unpacking the general *mêlée* of goods out of the robbers' chest, we came to a supply of firearms which had evidently been stolen. The captain, having untold murders over his head, was tried and executed, and he died as he had lived, 'game.'

All adventures with bushrangers do not end so well as this, however. Too often the worst of crimes are committed by these lawless men, and many poor settlers are ruined. Exciting and desperate as the game may be, I have always been attached to bush-hunting. Setting aside the danger and hazard of the undertaking, there is real pleasure in travelling in the wilds of the bush.

Australian scenery has a charm of its own in its grandeur and magnificence, and the climate is one of the most delightful in the world. In summer the sky is always one unvarying blue, like that of 'sunny Italy.' Then the birds and flowers are, to an appreciative mind, an endless source of delight. Bushranger hunting and botany may seem rather opposite pursuits; but it is strange that many of the Rangers (the Police Rangers of course) collect plants, and some form collections of the gorgeous and many-hued insects that abound. A day in the bush is delightful, and in summer a night passed under the serene and star-lit canopy of an Australian sky is equally pleasant. The sights and sounds of the bush are wonderful: the lovely *dianella* with its cerulean berries, the numerous orchids, and a hundred other

plants delight the eye with their rich foliage and many-coloured blossoms.

There is a perfect orchestra of birds and animals. These are the doleful cries of the magpies, the grating shriek of the cockatoos, the screaming of macaws; the melodious crooning of the bull-frogs in the lagoon, the shrill sound of the large tree-frogs, the never-ending chorus 'yock-karaka-roo' of the wattle birds, as they suck honey from the lofty iron-ash; the chattering of troops of kangaroos, and the outlandish cries of the wild turkeys. These sounds one hears during the whole of the day. At night there is the monotonous cry of the more-pork, with its perpetual request for 'pork'; the dull and mystic mutterings of the wombat, the uncouth snoring and snarling of the opossums, and the hoarse yells of tuons and flying squirrels, with a continuous *conversazione* of the monkeys. At early dawn the laughing jackass, risible bird, wakes one with his laughter. A formidable rival is he to the laughing hyena, and from his punctuality in waking early, he is christened the 'settlers' clock.'

I was mentioning that all adventures with bushrangers do not terminate so well as that narrated above; and a confirmation of this occurred in a brush I once had with the afore-mentioned 'gentry.'

At the time at which this adventure took place we were not actually on the track of the bushrangers, but we were simply travelling from one station to another. We got deep into the bush on the first day, and encamped for the night in a most romantic dell, which seemed just suited to the purpose. Whether it were the effect of the long day's journey, or the effect of sundry potations of spirit 'above proof,' to cure the said fatigue, I know not; but at all events the men who were to watch by our fire in turn during the night, fell asleep at their posts. We were awoke by hoarse cries, and on arousing we saw at least twenty dusky forms standing round with pointed weapons and scowling faces. We saw that it was no use to

contend against so many, as we were but eight in number. 'Yield, or you are dead men!' cried one, who seemed to have the command over the others. 'Bobus, take their weapons!' to a rough demon, who immediately relieved us of our 'barkers.' We were then bound and laid on our backs, and told to 'go to sleep and make the most of it, for it would be our last.' To sleep under such pleasant circumstances was impossible, so we feigned slumber and lay anxiously awaiting the daylight. It seemed to be an hour after our capture, when six more bushrangers joined the party, in a state of high and rough glee, for they had just robbed a well-known prospector, and, from what they said, had murdered him. 'What is that, Bill—blood on your ripper?' cried one. 'Yes, the old rip was game, so we nobbled him,' was the reply. They then began drinking deeply, and soon became half mad, when they relapsed into heavy sleep. At daybreak they began to move. We were blindfolded, and the whole party began to march. We went on for two or three hours, when they stopped, and the bandages were taken from our eyes. They had halted in a deep ravine, on one side of which there was a fearful precipice. The bushrangers then seemed to consult for a few minutes, and after that the captain addressed us. 'Well, boys, your game's up, so prepare for death; we give you five minutes to say what prayers you know, and square up.' Saying this, he drew out a watch and placed on the ground before him. The horror of those five minutes will never be forgotten. I seemed to try and fix my thoughts, but failed: my whole life seemed to rush before me like a vision, and my heart seemed ready to burst with thoughts of home and those I loved best. Such moments as those are enough to unhinge the stoutest heart. It seemed but a moment, and the captain took up the watch. 'Time's up!' he cried. The bushmen then seized four of our number, and tied a rope round each man, blindfolded each one again, and swung them all four over

the precipice, making fast the end of the ropes to a stake firmly fixed in the ground. Thus they hung dangling in mid-air. At a word from the chief a light was applied to the ropes, which, being damp, fired but slowly. They then dragged us off, and shouting hoarsely to our unfortunate comrades, bade them 'hold tight till they dropped,' and told them not to 'fall too heavy.' We were taken several paces on, and soon we heard the cries of our comrades as the burning rope gave way—and they fell: then all was still.

'Now your turn, my lads!' said the head demon, and we four were again blindfolded. 'Kneel down, you young cubs!' and we heard the tramp of some men to a little distance off. 'Cock your rifles!' was the cry: and we heard the ominous click of the locks. 'Make ready, present! one, two, three—fire!' shouted the captain. A report followed, and I expected to find myself riddled like a colander.

'Missed them, by ——!' cried the chief, apparently in a rage; and then the awful preparation was again gone through. 'Fire!'—and again there was no result. I waited a long time in an agony of terrible suspense, and no voice was heard, and nothing happened. Hours must have passed, and we still lay bound where they had set us, not daring to move. At last I found that the ropes that held me were not very strong, and with a concentrated effort I snapped them. In another moment I had torn the bandage from my face—and lo! no one was visible. I turned to my comrades and unbound them. The fear and delay had been too much for one of them to bear—he was

dead: fright must have killed him. Our lives appeared saved as by a miracle. We then bethought us of our companions who had been hung over the cliff, and I could not help having a lingering hope that they, too, had been saved in some way. We rushed to the precipice as we had imagined it to be, and what was our astonishment and surprise to find that it was no precipice, but merely a drop of a few feet; in fact, our comrades must have hung within a foot of terra firma.

There they were rolling on their backs on the ground in a very undignified manner, and beyond a bruise or two, they were unhurt. We soon made them as free as ourselves, and we all proceeded on our way to the next station, marvelling much as to our escape, and mourning over our lost mate. We buried him in a quiet spot, and the tall fern waves over his grave. It seemed the only solution of the mystery that the bushmen were really afraid to do us any harm, knowing that the whole colony would be up and after them, if they meddled with the Queen's officers. As they are not always so particular, this puzzled us much, but we were heartily thankful to have escaped so easily from the ruffians, though it must be confessed that they had given us a bit of a fright.

Thus it will be seen that a bushman hunter's life, though having its pleasures, has by far a greater proportion of dangerous business; and when it is considered what horrible characters they have to deal with, it seems wonderful how any one can be found ready to enrol himself amongst them; but I suppose danger has its charms to others besides your humble servant.

G. G. J.



THEN AND NOW.

A December Dream.

BRIGHT gleams the moon upon the snow,
 Sharp blows the keen December breeze,
 The leafless oaks sway to and fro
 Beneath the gale that bows the trees.
 The stars in myriad glory shine
 Across the silent whitened lawn,
 And through the distant clump of pine
 The clock bell marks the hour of dawn

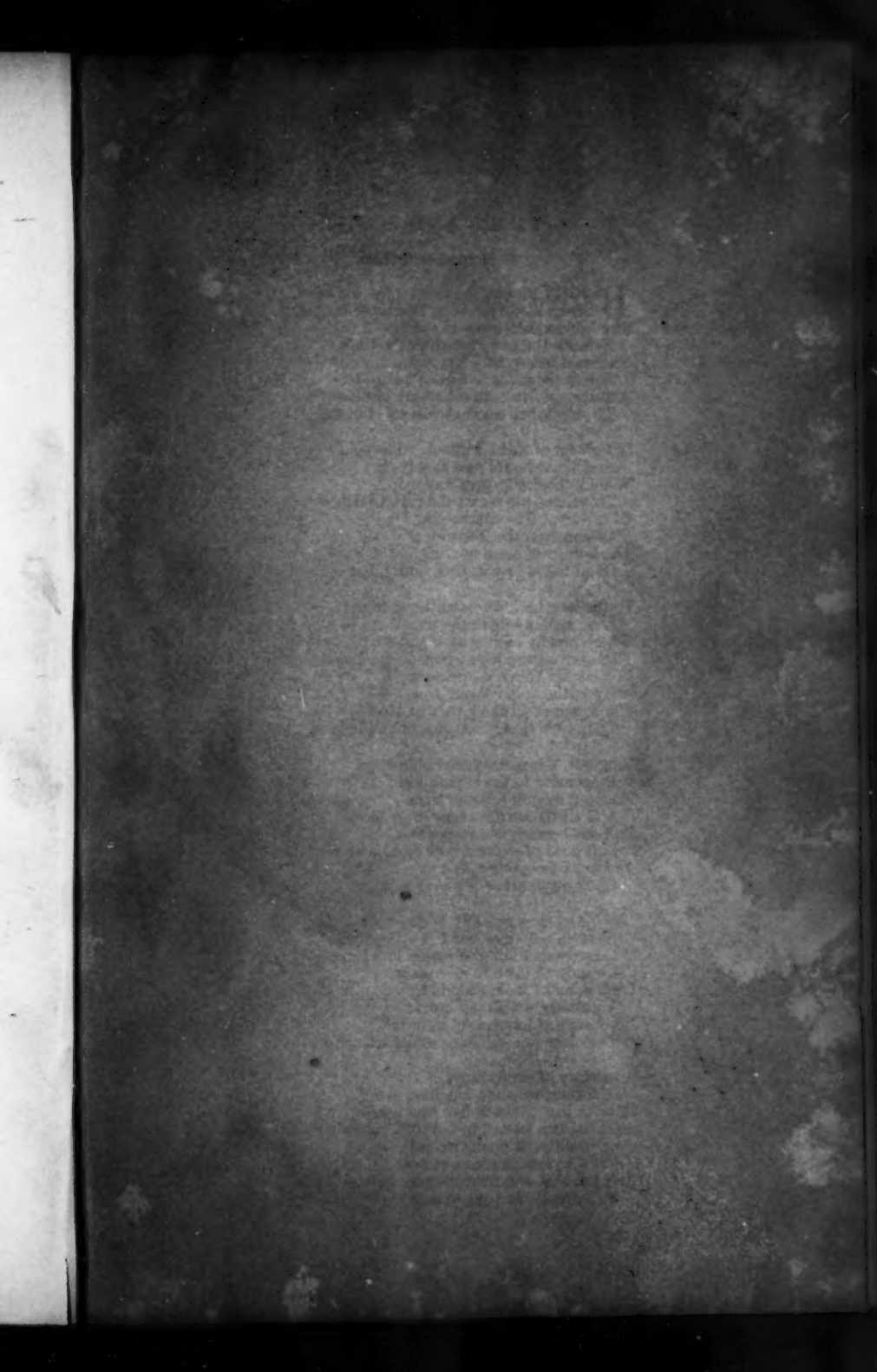
'Tis gloom of night without. The cold
 And silent hours pass slowly on.
 Within, the castle, grey and old,
 This night has learnt the garb to don
 Of revelry. The echoes ring
 Of music on the frosty air;
 The influences seem to cling
 Of all that's bright, enchanting, fair—

To the long hall, whose antlered sides
 Look stately upon the scene;
 Where rapidly each couple glides
 In easy waltz; where sweeps the queen
 Of that fair heritage—princess,
 By virtue of her lovely face;
 Her dower of all the gifts that bless—
 The jewels that guerdon youth and grace.

Ring out, soft melody, and chime,
 Responsive to the 'flying feet';
 Ring out as if in scorn of time,
 And all the sorrows time must meet.
 Roll out beneath the vesper star,
 Full flood of sound across the snow!—
 And yet I feel your music jar
 Upon my heart. 'Tis best to go.

Go? Ah! how can I? Weary years
 Have passed since last I saw the home,
 Whence—amid mingled smiles and tears—
 I wandered forth to idly roam.
 I left it, and I took, deep hid,
 A memory within my heart:
 No change of fortune yet hath bid
 That dear remembrance to depart.

A memory of sunny curls,
 Of loving, trusting, laughing eyes;
 Of teeth that gleamed like tiny pearls;
 Of features formed in beauty's guise:
 Child-beauty, exquisite to see;
 Child-accents, musical to hear.
 And can that dim remembrance be
 So far away, and yet so near?





SANS-PAREILLE.

"I have been wherever is beauty;
I have seen whatever is fair
On the land, on the strand, or in ocean,
Or the all-surrounding air.
But never in Art or in Nature,
O! maid of the wreathen brow,
Have I seen in my dreams or my waking
A lovelier thing than thou."

'Tis she, the young Princess, I think;
I will not break the olden spell.
I'm well world-hardened, yet I blush
From seeing her as now. They tell
A thousand legends of her face;
And verses to her beauty flow;
Yet doubt I if there lives the grace
Of yore. I turn and face the snow.

W. R.

TO A LADY'S PORTRAIT.

(WITH AN ILLUSTRATION.)

I HAVE been where the Whirlwind sped,
Kept holy the opening May,
And thought with a soul of Elysium
To screen her slumbers from the sea;
I have been where the gentle stream
Moved graceful sunset but a pace,
Where each day comes with the beauty
And pride of a thousand years.

I have been where the bright pencil
Was the slave of the painter's hand,
Till there glowed on the passionate mirror
A life he could not command;
I have been where the heart
That dances to the sweetest sound
Marked as the Loves and the Gleams
That people his happiest dreams.

I have seen the silent griefs and sighs
For the breath he had lost to the world,
That strained through the poet's anguish
Or was prest by the virgin's gaze;
I have seen the veins of the noble
Flame bleed from the hand of Art,
And the blue of a great Portent
From the depths of a glass stare.

I have been wherever is beauty,
I have seen whatever is fair
On her face, on the strand, or in song,
Or the all-surrounding air;
But never, in Art or in Nature,
O! maid of the woe-filled hour,
Have I seen in my dreams or my waking
A lovelier thing than thou.



HARRIET FAREWELL.

"I know him, wherever he be,
 I love him, wherever he be;
 On the land, on the strand, or in town,
 On the hills, or in the air,
 Not more to him, or in Nature,
 Of good or of evil, I know,
 Since I saw, at my first sight,
 A better thing than this."

'Tis she, the young Princess, I think ;
I will not break the olden spell.
I'm well world-hardened, yet I shrink
From seeing her as now. They tell
A thousand legends of her face ;
And verses to her beauty flow :
Yet doubt I if there lives the grace
Of yore. I turn and face the snow.

W. R.

TO A LADY'S PORTRAIT.

(WITH AN ILLUSTRATION.)

I HAVE been where the simple maiden
Kept holy the opening May,
And thought with a veil of blushes
To screen her charms from the day.
I have been where the gentle damsel
Moved graceful amongst her peers,
Where each met each with the beauty
And pride of a thousand years.

I have been where the magic pencil
Was the slave of the painter's hand,
Till there glowed on the passionate canvas
A life he could not command.
I have been where the fairy colours
That danced in the solar beams
Masqued as the Loves and the Graces
That peopled his happiest dreams.

I have seen the spent sculptor panting
For the breath he had lent to the stone,
That strained through the hero's armour,
Or was prest by the virgin's zone.
I have seen the veins of the marble
Take blood from the hand of Art,
And the files of a grand Pantheon
From the depths of a chaos start.

I have been wherever is beauty ;
I have seen whatever is fair
On the land, on the strand, or in ocean,
Or the all-surrounding air.
But never, in Art or in Nature,
O! maid of the wreathen brow,
Have I seen in my dreams or my waking
A lovelier thing than thou.

I have been where sceptred princes
Graced well the royalty
Of oceans, from island to island,
And of lands from sea to sea.
I have been where mimic monarchs
Wore mimic crowns on the brow;
But have seen, nor in fact nor in drama,
A statelier queen than thou.

I have been, by fantasy guided,
Where the heavenly Queen of Love,
And Hebe, the evergreen goddess,
Mingled their courts above.
But no deathless nymph on Olympus
Ever uttered a prayer or a vow
To Venus, or Hebe the youthful,
More divine or more pure than thou.

I have been where angels of mercy
Went in at the plague-fenced door,
Or gave back their youth to the aged
Or strange joy to the hearts of the poor.
But never, where all were gentle,
Did a fever-burning brow
Feel the cool soft hand of an angel
More tender and kind than thou.

If thou readest these halting verses,
That fain would soar in thy praise,
Forbid not the flame thou hast kindled,
O! Muse, dear to worthier lays:
Nor scorn that the poet, unselfish,
Loves thee as he loves a star;
And, kissing his hand to thine image,
Blesses thee from afar!

A. H. G.



FAST AND FIRM.

A Romance at Marseilles.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'CASTLE' AND 'THE CYPRESSES.'

IT was at the Marseilles railway station: why I was there, or where I was going, I don't exactly remember, so much having happened since, and I, just at that time, having no special reason to go to one place more than to another.

The express train from Paris had just come in.

She was standing a little aside, just out of the crowd and bustle, looking on, scanning every face as it passed and repassed: mine among others, and, as I fancied, with more interest than others. Her face was very pale, and her eyes were anxious, but she looked calm and self-possessed; her manner had no bashfulness, no hardihood.

Was she waiting for her fellow-passenger to rejoin her?

People hurried to and fro, each one intent on his or her business. No one approached this little lady.

By-and-by I saw her speak to an elderly woman, who, for a few moments, stood near her, a matured specimen, apparently, of the genus 'unprotected.' Of her I think she asked some question. From her she received, I fancied, a hurried, a not over-courteous answer. I saw a flush rise to her face as she turned away.

By this time the platform was almost clear. Such passengers as were by-and-by going on, had departed to refresh themselves; others had gone to their resting-places; the railway officials began to regard this solitary figure curiously. Raising my hat, speaking to her in French, with as formal a courtesy as I could command, I ventured to ask if she were waiting for anybody; wanting any information; if I could be in any way of any service to her. A shade as of perplexity or disappointment crossed her face when I thus addressed her.

She answered in better French than mine, while her eyes seemed to read mine with something more than curiosity—with interest.

'I was to have been met here. I see nobody who is looking for anybody. I am disappointed. I must wait here; some one will, perhaps, come yet. Thank you very much for your kindness, but I must wait.'

Again lifting my hat, I left her; but only to pace the platform and think about her. Wait! what had she to wait for? Any one meaning to meet her would have been there when the train came in. Alone there, and, most likely, strange to the place, what could she do? Meanwhile, there she stood, waiting, composedly, patiently.

As the minutes passed by, I thought she looked paler and paler; at last, as I approached her nearer than in my other turns, she came a few steps towards me.

'Will you be so kind,' she began in English, then, correcting herself, she spoke French.

I smiled. 'I am English, as you are.'

'Oh, I am so glad!' she said quite childishly. Then she added, 'I can offer no excuse for troubling you, but will you tell me what to do? I am come direct from London. I am going to my brother, who is ill in Rome. Some one was to have met me at Marseilles, and I know nothing about the route beyond this. My brother is very ill. I must travel quickly, or—' here she paused, or rather her voice failed her.

'Were you to go by land?'

'Yes; my brother forbade me to travel by water. Sea-travelling had killed him, and he won't let me try it.'

'But,' I said, quite angrily, 'it is an impossible journey for you to undertake alone by this route, or, indeed, by any route. What were your friends thinking of?'

'I was to have been met here, you know. I quite depended upon that.'

'But you have no business here at all. If you want to go by land, and quickly, you ought to have

gone by Chambéry, across Mount Cenis, by Susa, Turin, Milan——'

She turned so pale that I paused. She looked about for some resting-place; I gave her my arm, led her to the waiting-room, got her a glass of water and a cup of coffee, begging her to drink the latter.

She obeyed me, and as soon as she could speak, it was, 'You will tell me what to do now? My brother is very ill, perhaps dying. Will it be best to go back to—the place you spoke of, or, as I am here, to push on by this route? Which way is the quicker?'

'Where is your luggage? The train starts for Nice in five minutes. I am not sure what better you can do than push on by this route now you are here.'

She rose directly. 'I have no luggage but what is in that bag,' pointing to one I had taken from her when I gave her my arm.

'What a charming travelling-companion she would make!' I thought to myself.

She added as we hastened towards the platform, 'I left London at an hour's notice, in consequence of a telegram.' As I hurried her along, she asked, 'Are you going any further by this route?'

'Yes.'

'Would you kindly, while you are travelling the next stage, write me down directions?'

'Certainly.'

The ladies' carriage into which I looked was full; so I handed her into another, and got in myself, and as that small hand rested in mine, a curiously strong conviction entered my mind, and rested there.

I seated myself opposite to her, and having said, 'We shall have plenty of time to talk it over before we get to Nice,' I feigned to be fully occupied with route-books and maps in order to leave her quiet time to recover herself.

All the while that I seemed thus occupied, I was thinking intently. I was not very young or 'green.' I had heard of bewitched and bewitching widows and of childish-looking little adventuresses lying in wait, at such places as the Marseilles railway station, for men's

hearts to ensnare them and men's purses to make use of them, and I considered myself a man not likely to be imposed upon. Many a calm, investigating glance of mine rested on my opposite neighbour's face, her dress, her *ensemble*.

She did not speak to me: she turned her face to the window. I thought her earnestly interested in the fascinatingly romantic scenes past which we were flying—the rocky heights, castle-looking rocks and rocky-looking castles, the blue bays and grey olive-hoary plains, which she was seeing now probably for the first time. By-and-by, a gentle, stealthy movement of hers, a little hand slipped into her pocket, and then her handkerchief lifted to her face assured me she was crying.

I am always afraid of a woman who is crying. A man is a brute who can speak a harsh word to a weeping woman, and a kind one often changes a mild trickling of the salt waters to a deluge, so I left her alone.

She kept her hand, and her handkerchief in it, over her face, and her face turned towards the window as much as possible. I began to hope she would fall asleep. I believe I myself did fall asleep for a few moments. By-and-by I was roused by the falling of a book from my hand; when I opened my eyes I found my opposite neighbour's fixed upon me, with a look of waiting for the opportunity of addressing me. She had left off crying then; that she had cried a good deal her face told; her lids were reddened in tiny spots; she was looking very wan and ill.

She had her purse open in her hand.

'Shall I have enough money?' she asked me, holding it towards me, when I gave signs of being fully awake.

I took the poor little poorly-furnished purse in my hand. 'Oh, yes, if you don't get cheated; and as I am going to Rome by this route, I will see to that, if you will allow me.'

'You are going to Rome?' Such a light in the eyes, and such a pretty transient flush over the de-

licate face. 'You are going all the way that I have to go?'

'Yes.' It was the state of her purse that had finally decided me.

She put the purse I returned to her back in her bag. After that, and when I pretended to be looking in another direction, I saw her small hands folded together, and was confident that her lips formed the words 'Thank God!' Somehow I was more touched than I could have told reason for by this.

'Have you slept at all on the road?' I asked presently.

'No; I have been too anxious.'

'Try and sleep now, or you will be utterly worn out. I am going to do my best to take care of you. Try and fancy I am the friend your brother sent for you. I will try and take as good care of you as if I was.' It was not a case for half-measures, you see; I leant forward, not to be overheard, and spoke earnestly.

'You are very good,' she said, and her eyes filled.

I put my hat-box for her feet, and threw my wrapper over her; then I immersed myself in my books again.

Two old ladies and one old gentleman were nodding in the other compartment of the carriage. For a long time I did not stir hand or foot or look at my neighbour, hoping that, her mind more at ease, she might catch the infection of their drowsiness. She did; when I did venture to look at her she was asleep. Her hat lay on her knee: her head was leant back in the angle of the cushions. The light of the carriage-lamp—it had grown dusk now—slanted down from the bright hair, threw a shadow of long lashes on the pale cheek, fell on the pretty round white throat; but it did not look easeful sleep; the mouth retained lines of anxiety and depression. I did not look at her long; I was afraid of disturbing her, and besides it seemed to me that it would be a piece of unchivalrous audacity and profanity to take that advantage of the unconsciousness of one so strangely thrown upon my protection. Her hat slipped off her knee and fell to the floor of the carriage: I picked it up

reverently and laid it on my own, which was on the seat beside me. I fell to considering it: it was a modest little hat, pretty, but not in a coquettish way; simple, tasteful, and free from any of the grotesque and unsuitable excrescences (I can't call them ornaments) I have wondered at on other women's head-gear. Her whole dress had struck me, as I first noticed her at the station, as having a special appropriateness, a neat completeness, an absence of all superfluity, and yet no absence of feminine gracefulness.

'Who is she? What is she?' I pondered, and as I pondered my eyes, for the first time, fell upon a card fastened to the handle of her bag, which I had put on the seat beside me, to give her more room, when I begged her to try and sleep.

The name—not a common one—was not unfamiliar to me, and yet the familiarity of it carried me far back into the past.

'Harkness?' I kept repeating. I questioned and perplexed myself to no purpose, but, by-and-by, when I had given up, or imagined that I had, thinking about the matter, it all came to me.

Harkness was the name of an old drawing-master of mine. Harkness was the name of a young school-fellow of mine. Harkness was a name that for two or three years I had seen in the Royal Academy's Catalogue as the painter of pictures which had struck my fancy—mostly scenes in the country round Rome, cattle and peasants of the Campagna. For the sake of the name as much as for the pictures themselves, I had purchased some two or three, I forget which, of these works (I bought up many more of them afterwards, for her sake) at the time, wondering if that young artist Harkness was my young schoolfellow Harkness.

I now determined that the two should certainly be one, and that one the brother of my little companion, who must as certainly be the 'sister Ruth' of whom he had often talked, a baby girl then and the object of his almost idolatrous affection.

While she slept I furnished up my memory as to all matters re-

garding the two Harknesses, father and son; it was some time before I could remember the son's Christian name, much to my vexation; but, at last, that came too, Harold—Harold Harkness. I was triumphant, almost anxious the tired little sleeper should wake, quite resolved that Harold Harkness should have been my very dear friend. I could remember, happily, that I had sometimes been of service to him; that I had been fond of the boy; that he had been a bright, beautiful-faced, fair-haired little fellow, who had nourished a romantic and grateful regard for me.

My charge, so I now regarded Ruth Harkness, moaned in her sleep in a faint, distressful sort of way.

I bent towards her: we were stopping at a station, Cannes, I think. She roused herself.

'Could you get me a glass of water?' she asked; 'I am so sorry to give you trouble.'

'You feel ill, faint? I'll be back directly.' I sprang out: I brought her a glass of water into which I had put a little cognac. 'You needn't be afraid, it's not too strong, it will do you good. I'm a sort of a doctor.'

She took it with a grateful, confiding look, and drank it. Having paid a porter to return the glass, I was lingering on the platform, near the carriage door, regardless of warnings to get in, amusing myself by watching the eager hurry of others, wishing in that manner to show myself an old, experienced traveller, perhaps, when she looked out.

'If you should be left behind, or get hurt in getting in in a hurry,' she said. I was in the carriage before she had finished speaking, her anxious face was enough. It was new to me to feel myself of paramount importance to anybody; a very novel and pleasant sensation.

I brought her a small nosegay, of Provence rosebuds, jasmine, and violets; but I took it away from her almost directly, saying, 'The perfume is too strong.'

She let me do as I pleased, but she looked at the flowers lovingly.

'You are better now?'

'Oh yes, thank you! I had been dreaming painfully about Harold, my brother.'

'I wonder when you ate anything last.'

'I have eaten some biscuits I had with me; they told me I should have plenty of time to get refreshment by the way, but I was afraid to lose my place, and the bustle confused me.'

'Then you have lived on biscuits since you left London?'

'I have not been hungry.'

'I have made a very pleasant discovery while you were asleep, Miss Harkness,' I said, pointing to the card on her bag. 'This is your name?'

'Yes.'

'It is a well-known name to me. A favourite schoolfellow of mine was called Harold Harkness, a favourite artist of mine, whose works I have greatly admired, is called Harold Harkness. Now don't tell me you are not the "little sister Ruth" he used to talk about.'

'I am only too glad and proud to tell you that I am.'

'You don't ask who I am, or seem surprised at my discovery.'

'No,' she answered, slightly smiling. 'I knew before.'

'Knew me?'

'Yes; Harold used to talk to me about you enough to make me remember the name very well; and while you were walking up and down the platform at Marseilles I read your name upon your luggage.'

'But how did you come to associate the luggage with its right owner? I did not go near it.'

'By instinct, I suppose partly, and partly because Harold once tried to paint a likeness of you from memory, and you are still enough like his picture to have made me notice your face before I noticed the name on the luggage.'

When we reached Nice—how wonderfully lovely under the moonlight some parts of that route looked!—the sharply-lined sea alps against a clear, large-starred sky, the smooth-flashing little bays, the crystallized slopes of olives, the romantic and significant looking

black files of cypresses, like a mournful, mourning, funereally-draped procession—when we reached Nice, I wondered what it would be best to do with Miss Harkness. I studied the faces of the old ladies, our travelling companions, but they had a sour, grim way of looking at me and my charge; they spoke together about us, and shook their heads. I did not venture to ask them to be charged with the care of her till morning, as I did not wish to own to them that I was not her legitimate protector—her brother or her husband.

As I handed Miss Harkness from the carriage, I felt that she was trembling.

'You cannot go on till the eight o'clock diligence in the morning. I shall secure a room for you at an hotel where I can rely upon your being safe and comfortable; I shall engage your place in the diligence to-night, and call for you in the morning.' This as I led her to a cab.

'How can I ever thank you for your kindness?'

'It is nothing. I am a very idle, unoccupied fellow, at anybody's service—especially at the service of your brother's sister.'

'If only he is alive to thank you! You think I cannot go on to-night?'

'I know you cannot.' I did not know it, but I knew she ought not.

The mistress of one of the Nice hotels was well and favourably known to me. I committed Miss Harkness to her care, explaining in few words the object of her journey.

Then I ordered—and I remember I took great pains with its selection—a little dinner for one, of soup, game, cutlets, sweets, choice fruit and coffee, to be served as soon as possible to No. 99; and after I had done that, I went about my own business. I secured the coupé of the diligence and one place in the banquettes as far as Genoa. I sent a telegram to Marseilles to request that my luggage, which I had left unowned there, should be taken charge of till further notice. I dined at an hotel close to the diligence office, drank coffee, smoked, lounging on the esplanade and look-

ing towards the windows of the house where I had left Miss Harkness, and wondered dreamily what would come of this very strange adventure of mine.

Suppose a wife should come of it? Pshaw! most unlikely! What probability was there that a sweet girl like this should be disengaged.

To what sort of a fellow, however, if he lets her run such risks as these? Suppose she had fallen into bad hands as completely as she had fallen into mine—which shall be harmless for her, God knows!

She would not have fallen into bad hands.

There is judgment, discernment, wisdom beyond her years in that sweet little face, with its serene brow and clear eyes, its firm, rather sad mouth.

I was sorry she had seen my name, otherwise I could have laid the flattering unction to my soul that it was my face which had inspired her with confidence.

But what on earth could she have done had I not been there? What in the name of heaven would have become of her? Well! heaven guards its own. Heaven knows what would have become of her.

When I tired of my moonlight rambling by the shores of that wonderful Bay of Nice, and went to my hotel, I found it was too late to be worth while going to bed that night, so I watched till morning.

I was at her hotel pretty early, anxious to settle her account before she should be troubled about it. I ordered breakfast to be taken to her in her room, and sent a pencilled message to her, telling her I had arranged everything.

I shan't easily forget the earnestly grateful look she gave me when we met. As I tucked her up snugly in the coupé—

'Had she been comfortable?' I asked.

'Oh, yes; I had thought of everything. I had been most kind,' she answered, her eyes full of tears. And then—'where was I going?' with a half alarm in her tone and her face, as she found I did not take my place beside her.

'To the banquettes, up above; I

am your courier, mademoiselle: one sees better there, but this is fitter for a lady.'

It was an early February morning: the sun and sky as bright as only a Riviera sun and sky could be; the Mediterranean blue, as only the Mediterranean could be.

That wonderful Cornice Road! I had often travelled it before; but that only made me better able to admire it then. Now high on the hills, where you seemed to have glimpses of a whole Switzerland of snow-mountains; where you had below you bay after bay glittering azure or violet, town, village, and tower, and distant expanse of sea; where you looked upon little castellated cities sitting on their natural fortifications, secure, impregnable:—then down to the shores, through the queerest and quaintest of small ports, past new-built and building fleets, between boughs loaded with lemons, through orchards of lemons, past the palm-groves of Bordighera—what an enchanted world it seemed! Mediaeval and romantic, northern strength, southern grace; but it is not of these things I care to talk now.

We did not stop more than a few hours at Genoa. How long we were upon our route altogether I cannot distinctly remember. We had bad weather at one time, cold and rain, snow, wind, and hail; that was, I think, in crossing the Apennines between Sestris and Spezia. She never complained, though she got so benumbed with cold that she would have fallen, but that I caught her in my arms, one evening as I was helping her to alight—that was at Spezia—she never complained.

Caught her in my arms! yes; and before I knew it had given her a sort of compassionate hug, exclaiming, 'You poor, tired, patient child!' I couldn't help it.

Rail from Spezia to Leghorn; past the marble quarries of Carrara, past Pisa; rail and diligence to Civita Vecchia, rail to Rome. Our journey was not long since, you see.

When we reached Rome, in the full brightness of a sunny morning, she *did* look travel-worn, fagged, and jaded. The night before, in a

crowded diligence—I had not been able to secure a coupé for her—she had slept great part of the night, her head upon my shoulder—a sleep of such profound exhaustion as had half alarmed me. I had ventured to put my arm round her, to draw her to me, in order to support her better—what a slight, fragile-feeling form it was! As I held her thus, and she slept this dead sleep, my eyes never closed, and my mind was very busy.

What would be the end of this journey?

Should her brother be already dead?

Friendless, moneyless, homeless, alone!

When we stopped once she half roused; she looked up in my face as I bent down to her.

'I am afraid I weary you,' she said. 'I can't help it; I'm *so* tired!' she was half stupefied with fatigue; almost before she had finished speaking her head drooped on my shoulder again.

I pressed her closer for answer—that was all.

'Your wife, poor young thing, seems quite worn out,' said a kindly, half quakerish-looking lady sitting opposite. I had noticed how pleasantly and compassionately she glanced at Ruth. A few days ago I should on this have told Ruth's story, and claimed a woman's protection for a woman; but now—well, I was jealous and selfish. I wanted her all to myself, wanted her to be cared for with my cares—all mine, only mine.

I answered simply, 'She *is* worn out; she has travelled from London almost without stopping: she has a brother dying in Rome.'

'Poor, poor young thing! But she is happier than many; she will meet sorrow with one by her who loves her with more than the love of a brother.'

My conscience was roused: none of our other fellow-travellers could hear us; I briefly told her Ruth's story, and finished by asking, 'Are you going to stay in Rome?'

'Yes, friend, and shall be glad to be of service to the young lady.'

'You may perhaps be of the

greatest service.' I gave her my card and she gave me hers, pencilling on it her address in Rome.

'This your brother's address?' I asked Ruth, as we approached Rome, reading a card she gave me.

'Yes; you are surprised. Why?'

'This is such a miserable quarter.'

'Oh! he is very poor, and always saving, saving, to be able soon to give me a home,' she said. 'He says I never shall be happy as a governess, nor he to know me one.'

'Ruth,' I said, taking her hand as we drove through the streets. 'Let me call you so. I am not a stranger now; I am a brother to you, wishing to be to you more than any brother; but I am not going to speak of that now. Are you prepared for a great shock? Can your physical system bear it? I know that brave mind will. I mean if your brother should be very, very ill, dying—dead.'

She shuddered. 'You have said the word; I could not. I have been thinking day after day that he is dead; that is why—'

'Why no one met you?'

'Yes.'

'I fear, poor child, you may be right. You will try to bear up bravely; and—you will let me be a brother to you till—'

Now our cab stopped.

'This street is enough to have killed him,' she said. 'Surely it is not here?'

We had stopped in one of the narrow, filthy, as a matter of course foul-smelling streets of which there are plenty in Rome.

'It is here,' I said, as the cabman opened the door.

I gave the word, 'Wait,' and lifted her out.

Up the dank, chill, dirty stair, up and up. At last we reached a door on which the poor fellow's card was nailed.

She seemed to gather courage now. She led the way, through a small dark ante-room, in which I paused.

I listened.

I heard a smothered exclamation from her; from him a cry so shrill as to be almost a scream—'Ruth!'

I walked to the head of the stair-

case and waited there, perhaps half an hour; then she came to me; came close up to me and laid her hand upon my arm—the expression of the piteous eyes lifted to mine told me there was no hope.

With a caressing word I drew her to me: she leant her forehead against my arm a moment, then—

'Harold wants to see you; Harold wants to thank you,' she said, in a scarcely audible voice.

I followed her into the room.

The full light of a small square window, from which one could see the Tiber, the Castle of St. Angelo, and the line of Mons Janiculus, was streaming on a low couch where my poor young schoolfellow lay.

I saw directly that life with him was a question of no more than days, perhaps of only hours.

Yet what a beautiful bright face it was still! what a light streamed from those radiant eyes as he, without rising—he was past that—stretched both hands towards me.

Ruth was crouching by him; one hand soon clutched her again, the other grasped mine as I sat down by him.

In this strange world how often are simple deeds, that cost nothing to the doer, most richly rewarded! What had I done? What sacrifice had I made? And how they thanked and blessed me! He with his difficultly-spoken, faint words; she with her blessed eyes confirming his praises.

A few words explained the case.

He had rallied after sending the first telegram, and had thought it needless that Ruth should come: he had not calculated on the possibility of her starting as immediately as she had done; and the second message which bid her not come had not reached her.

A few days after—two days since now—he had broken a blood-vessel, and had been pronounced beyond hope.

'If only I had known of all this sooner!' I thought, as I looked at the miserable room, and thought of my idle hundreds and thousands.

When, by-and-by, Ruth for a brief while absent,—a woman living in the rooms below, who had been

very kind to Harold, had taken her away to give her some refreshment,—I stammeringly expressed something of my regret, he answered—

‘It is better as it is; for myself I am well content. I believe in another working-world, where there will be a better light, a truer sight, more beauty to perceive, and purer senses to receive it.’

‘Is your sweet sister free?’ I asked; ‘free from any engagement—free-hearted?’ I spoke low and hastily, and felt in all my being how much hung upon his answer.

‘My little Ruth?—oh yes: as far as I know; and she has never had any secrets from me.’

‘I love her,’ I responded. ‘If she can love me, I will do what a man can to make a woman happy as a wife.’

He did not immediately answer: he lay with closed eyes; but I felt the tightening pressure of his hand.

‘I may tell her, by-and-by, that I had your good wishes?’

‘You may tell her,’ the radiant eyes unclosing on me, ‘that in my last hours I drank a full cup of happiness, believing that my darling, my little Ruth, my ewe-lamb, my pet sister, would be happy among happy women as your wife.’

‘You have not lost your generous-hearted enthusiasm for a very unworthy fellow,’ I answered.

‘Nothing I have heard of my old friend, my protector, my benefactor, has tended to lessen those feelings,’ he said.

‘One word of yours in your sister’s ear will make me—’

She came in at that moment. I was going to leave them together, but he begged me not to go; and while he spoke a mortal faintness surprised him.

It passed, however. He asked to be lifted up: the recumbent position was painful to him: he lay with his head on Ruth’s shoulder, bright hair mingling with bright hair.

The doctor came and went, and the woman who had nursed him: they both foreboded that the last hour was near.

It was an afternoon not to be forgotten. He said he did not suffer much: now and again he talked;

and when he talked wisdom not of this world was in his words.

Ruth did not shed a tear: she seemed absorbed in him beyond consciousness of self or sorrow: she moistened his lips or wiped his brow continually, and her eyes seemed to cling to his.

The sunset entering the room touched those two. She was watching him intently: his eyes closed, half-opened, seemed to look at her dreamily, like the eyes of one who dozes off to sleep. The light faded; the dusk gathered: we did not stir, believing that he slept.

By-and-by through the gloom, the near hush and the distant noise of the great city, Ruth’s voice, low and awe-struck, reached me, asking for light. I had fallen into profound thought—life, love, death and immortality, failure, success, the world’s vanity,—I do not know what I did not think of as I sat motionless in that dusky room.

I procured a lamp: I set it down on the table, where the light fell on those faces. I found that Ruth had sunk lower and lower as the head on her shoulder grew heavier. A glance told me the truth: he was dead.

She saw it: she knew it. She sank down lower yet, till his bright head was on the pillow, hers beside it. She moaned softly, lying thus cheek to cheek. I heard a few words:

‘Brother, take me, take me with you; I have none but you.’

Then she lay quite still, half on the couch, half on the floor, face to face with the dead.

What did I do?

I stood and looked at them.

As I stood and looked at them, I went through one of those experiences that it is no use to try and record; that are written in the life of life, upon the heart of heart, for ever.

By-and-by I found that she was lying in a dead faint.

I disentangled them then, and laid her on the floor on as good a couch as I could make of my wrapper and of the cushions of an old chair.

I had told her the truth when I

told her I was a sort of doctor. That had been the profession I had not loved well enough to follow, after a large fortune left me had made the pursuit of a profession needless. I could treat her as well as another. I did what I could for her, and saw her revive. My entreaties prevailed on her, after a time, to leave the room for a few hours, going with the woman of the rooms below: but before the night had half passed, she was back again.

'Do not be angry with me. I want to sit and look at him. I won't cry. Soon I shall lose him for ever.'

She took her station by him: she begged me to go away somewhere to get some rest. I pretended to yield, but found myself too anxious to go beyond the ante-room: she was not in a state to be left alone.

The dawn brought the horrible and harrowing business—of putting away, out of sight, out of reach, the mortality that has been so dear, that we have clutched so close, and never could keep too near—to my mind.

I talked to her as little as I could and as gently. Gently! if words could have floated on the air like eider down, or touched her with gossamer-light touches, they would still have seemed to me too rough to be cast at her then. Still I was forced to try and ascertain her wishes.

'You know what is best, you will do what is most right,' she answered me gently; 'but don't ask me to leave the house while he is in it. Think of the long years that I have not seen him, think of the long years that——' There she paused, burst into violent weeping—she had not cried before—'Oh, I feel as if my heart was breaking!' she said, pressing her hands over it.

I clasped her to me; I comforted her as well as I could, reminding her, as well as I knew how, of how well things must be with her beloved brother. I spoke, too, of the place where we would lay him to rest, of the country quiet among the roses, the violets, the cypresses.

She lay quiet in my arms, and by-and-by lifted up her face to listen. To see that sweet, sad face resting against my breast, to look down

upon it, and meet its trustful eyes, filled me with over-mastering emotions.

'If you can love me,' I said then, 'you need never feel alone or unsheltered, never more while I live. This is no unfit place or time to tell you this, for he knew I loved you, and was glad in knowing it; but I do not ask or expect or desire any answer, not now.'

I hardly know that she then took in the sense of my words; sorrow and exhaustion had drained her life. No tinge of colour came to her cheek; she just listened.

'How good you are! how good you are!' she said. 'What could I have done but for you?'

I arranged everything for the best as far as I knew; I tempted her from the room to go with me to the Protestant graveyard beyond the walls, to choose where he should lie. She seldom spoke; she said afterwards it was all like a dream, from which she expected at any moment to awake.

The next day we buried him.

When all was done we lingered near the place. A spring-breathed soft wind was blowing; spring-voiced sweet birds were singing; the cypresses were swaying to and fro; the mild spring sun was shining; the place was very soothing and peaceful—towered over by the great monumental pyramidal tomb of some forgotten great one, with the wonderful city of the dead, of memories, and of surviving art lying in sight.

That was a day to be remembered.

I promised her that the grave should be cared for better than any other in the place; that flowers should always blossom on it, and its head-stone never be moss-enrusted.

When we went away I took her to the care of that motherly, kind, quakerish lady of the diligence, whom I had prepared to receive her.

I did not see her again for some days; she was too exhausted, when the reaction from long over-tension set in, to leave her bed.

I called every day, and always found some gentle-worded, grateful message ready for me; but day after day I did not see her.

At last a bright day came when I did.

She was more altered, more broken-down-looking than I had anticipated; the meeting me agitated her very greatly; her black dress, too, increased the delicacy of her look. Mrs. Norrison stood by her, smoothing her hair and petting her with loving deeds and words till she was calmer, then, good woman, she left us together.

I had no idea what lay before me. Our interview was a long one. More than once I left her side, and paced the room in despair, stood at one or other of the windows that looked down over the city, and pondered how I could convince her of my love, that is to say, of the selfish and interested nature of it.

She met my definite offer of my hand and heart (as the novelists phrase it) with the most meekly, humbly firm refusal.

Her gratitude was so full and so lowly, her agitation so great that I could not be angry with her, but I was greatly irritated, and turned my irritation against myself; cursed myself that I could find no words strong enough to convince her. She had set me on a pinnacle, and she would keep me there, and I wanted to be no higher than the level of her love.

It was just like me, she told me. Just like what she had always heard of me. She would always love me with the most grateful, reverent love, always remember me in her prayers, but be my wife—no.

It was long before I could get a reason why; but at last I tortured it from her. She believed that I was sacrificing myself, that I loved her because she was friendless and alone; but she was not fit for me,

she told me; she had not the accomplishments, the education, the talent, the beauty, the anything that my wife should have. As for her future I need not be anxious, she assured me. Mrs. Norrison had told her that here, in Rome, she could procure her a suitable situation.

At last, when I had exhausted every argument, or thought I had, and despaired, at all events, of present success, I grew hurt and angry; I turned from her to a window, and stood looking out. A veil of blackness gathered between me and all I looked on. I was ill with anger, disappointment, and thwarted will.

I don't know how long I had stood so (but I believe it was a long time) when the softest of small hands entered mine, which hung down beside me. I started and looked round. She was looking up into my face so wistfully, her own face strained with pain and earnestness.

'You look so pained, so displeased,' she said. 'I must seem to you so thoroughly heartless and ungrateful. I cannot bear it.'

Before I knew what she was going to do she was kneeling beside me; before I could prevent her, her soft fingers were raising my hand to her softer lips.

I lifted her up; holding her by the shoulders, I asked her, I am afraid almost fiercely, 'Can you tell me that you do not love me?'

'No, I cannot; I do love you: I love you very dearly.' Her tears began to fall, and she, tottering towards me, shed them on my breast.

I held her there, fast and firm, and never since has she disclaimed the right to be there.



THE LAMENTATIONS OF AN OLD SPORTSMAN.

SIR—If I did not know that grumbling is often salutary, and that the utterances of experience, even when combined with prejudice, are not unprofitable, I should have scruples in troubling you with my correspondence, which may be truly called, 'The Lamentations of an Old Sportsman.' Yet I fancy I have some right to discharge the overflowings of my spleen upon you, since it is your province to aid in the annihilation of those disorders that occasioned it; and I know that it is no small alleviation of my grievances that I have an obliging Editor to whom I can communicate them.

One of the finest seasons for partridge-shooting ever witnessed has just drawn to its close, and has left behind it a host of pleasant recollections in many hearts. Would it had done so in mine, instead of impressing me with a painful sense of deterioration and degeneration! Partridge-shooting is so altered, that I can scarce believe it is the same recreation which I used to pursue thirty years ago. A thorough sportsman is now seldom met with; clever dogs are becoming few and far between; while guns too clever by half counterbalance deficiency in skill, and swell the game-bag to respectable dimensions. I must admit that I am generally in a minority of one; but I hope there are still two or three left who, like myself, see with sorrow the head of the gunmaker substituted for that of the shooter.

Two years ago my son induced me to buy him a breech-loader; but how he did it, I never could clearly make out. He said it was quicker, cleaner, and safer, and had the general voice in its favour. Quicker, forsooth!—why should guns be quicker? Why should the balance of power between the birds and their foe be destroyed? Make an achievement easy, and you destroy the gratification consequent upon performing it. To suppose that bagging fifty brace is identical with sport is a mistaken view. My nephew,

young Muffikin, blazing away for a couple of hours in a well-stocked turnip-field, does not enjoy himself half as much as I do when I walk after birds, instead of among them. I stand silent as death, and load my gun with Ponto motionless before me; he rams in his cartridges as he goes along, and never makes his dog drop to shot. But surely the discipline of down-charge is as good for the dogs as that of muzzle-loading is for their master. The performance of an irksome duty is a steady process for both of them, and, moreover, gives the game a fair chance. Poor partridges! how true as regards them is the hackneyed quotation, '*Ars longa, vita brevis!*'

Then as to cleanliness. It is not a very onerous thing to keep a gun of any kind tolerably clean. My old Joe Manton, I warrant me, was never dirty long. I used to wash it out myself, when I came in, and thought it good fun enough. I do not know why I liked it, no more than I know why my wife liked bothering with that baby; but a fact is a fact, all the world over. Muffikin tells me to get a muzzle-loader cleaned is a frightful bore. Between you and me, I won't leave that fellow a farthing. Again, as to safety. Ah! I suppose it was the safety argument which had some weight with me. I knew that in loading guns have gone off in the most experienced hands. And then my daughter asked if I should like to see Arthur shot; and, though I made no reply, I felt I should not like it at all. Lately, however, my mind has had its misgivings with respect to the superior safety of breech-loaders. Cartridges are generally carried loose in the pocket. Suppose a fall, in getting over a hedge, on a ruck of stones, or a tumble from the top of a gate; suppose, in short, that the pin of a cartridge came in sudden collision with any hard substance, either within the pocket or without; or say a cartridge dropped from the hand on the floor,—in any of these

cases surely there *may* be an explosion. I never spoke to Arthur on the subject, because he would have had his own way, and either have stoutly denied the risk, or gloried in it. He is a hectoring sort of fellow, and comes 'of an obstinate breed, and, to tell the truth, I am a little afraid of him. But when Muffikin was here, and had put a lot of cartridges in a big sandwich tin, to be strapped on his back, 'Good heavens!' said I, 'do you wish to kill yourself? A single jolt in jumping off a hedge bank, and bang goes one of the pins against the side of the box, and you are blown to ribbons!' I then struck an empty cartridge-case against the doorstep, and off went the cap. 'Who would have thought it?' cried the young gentleman, turning as pale as a sheet. 'Really, uncle, I am very much obliged to you.'

Lastly, as to the general voice. Why, I am an old Tory, and hate the general voice. 'The public,' as Milton finely observed, 'are owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs.' I wish the readers of Tennyson and Trollope would sometimes take a dip into Milton. The glorious ancients are getting more and more despised by nineteenth-century shallowness and conceit. Now it is not only the guns which are not what they were, but those who handle them are likewise altered for the worse. I believe Muffikin to represent a 'large and increasing class. He is Cockney-bred and born. He comes to see his country cousins in September, and thinks he ought to shoot. Besides, it sounds well in London to declare your fondness for the gun, and to regret that you only killed forty brace of birds on the first. Old dowagers begin to sniff the ownership of county acres, and give their daughters the wink accordingly. Young Hopeful gets asked to dinner, and tells more lies.

How on earth did it happen that I, Bilbury Bloke, came to shoot with Muffikin? As far as I can recollect, it was on this wise. One night, after I had composed myself in bed, my wife, who had been more civil than usual all the evening, suddenly ex-

claimed, 'By-the-by' (such a commencement augurs no good, and always makes me tremble)—'By-the-by, Bilbury, as we shall not have our dear Arthur with us this year, we might ask young Muffikin down for the shooting.'

'I hate Muffikin,' I replied; 'I always feared that the cross between my sister and a mere money-making banker would not answer; and Sally repents it now, only she does not like to say so.'

This 'riz' my better half at once. 'Mr. B.,' said she, severely, 'you need not be coarse. Mr. Muffikin is your brother-in-law; and, what is more, gives very nice dinners, and does not affect bearish manners. As for Robert, he has plenty to say for himself, and was in the very best set at Oxford. To be sure he did not take a degree, but we all know that he would have done so had he possessed your rude health and your unblinking assurance.' I was checked, because I was mated, and in the end Robert came.

'What a beautiful morning for you and the partridges!' observed my legal plague, as I was shaving on September 1st, 1865. 'My dear,' I replied, and (bad luck to it) gave my chin a bit of a cut just at that moment, 'you know I dislike shooting so early in the season. I wish to give the birds a little law, and to be able to give a sportsman's answer, when some ass or other hails me across the street, "I say, Bloke, old boy, what sport on the first? I'll lay odds your bag was not so good a bag as mine." My wife could not see it; she wondered why I delighted in doing odd things, and 'of course Robert will expect to do as all sensible people do.' I gave in, as I had done many a time before, and sat down to breakfast, determined to be amiable. 'Good-morning, Robert, I suppose you would like to visit the stubbles this glorious day?'

'Well, uncle, I confess I should; but, to tell the truth, I am rather in a fix. Miss Lee suggests croquet.' (Miss Lee is an affected little minx, and I cannot see what people find to admire in *her*.) 'I am like the boy,' continued he, with a simper, 'who was whipped for halting in his

choice between jam and marmalade.' I pitied him, and was silent. But at last he made up his mind that he ought to shoot. I wonder if it had struck him that I had made up mine in half the time that he ought not.

'Toho! Ponto, toho, you brute!' shouted my affectionate nephew, rushing harum-scarum up to the dog, while I was beginning to make a quiet circuit in order to head the birds. Bang, bang! By Jove he's down! by Jove he ain't! ma-a-rk! hold up, good dog! Wher'll they go, keeper? It is useless to go into details. If firing into coverts, winging birds, loading in a jog-trot, talking and shouting, chaffing the keeper, and asking if the old duffer was anything of a shot, sipping sherry, and carrying the gun on full-cock are exasperating, I had every right to be exasperated. I can just tolerate the man who, fully aware of his danger, deliberately chooses to hover between life and death by keeping his gun cocked; but I feel nothing but disgust and indignation when an arrant coward like Muffikin has neither head enough to perceive the extent of his peril, nor sense enough to provide against it. Once on that day his cowardice was conspicuous. We were getting over into a cow-pasture. 'Uncle,' said a voice, 'are there any bulls here?' 'I dare say,' replied I, wondering what he was driving at. 'Are they not very dangerous creatures?' he rejoined. 'Well, they are likely enough to run at a fellow in scarlet stockings.' Upon this my nephew refused to go into a field where there were cattle, and was just a little ashamed of his get-up. For my own part, I hate knickerbockers. I know a certain person who shall be nameless, who had something more than mere apologies for calves at Muffikin's age, but who would have scorned to parade them. No! he had too much sense and modesty for that. Mrs. B. says she likes them. I wish they had been going in my day, and then perhaps she would have married some one who wore them, and never become

a thorn in the flesh to your humble servant.

I had a fresh trial or two after my day's shooting. At nine o'clock I entered the drawing-room for a cup of tea. There I found my friend Robert, hopping about like a water-wagtail, handing cups, and making himself so agreeable to the ladies. 'Miss Bloke, I hope your father was not over-fatigued with his exertions; I was sadly afraid of tiring him; I can walk any distance myself, and sometimes am stupid enough to forget that others are not able to do so. Miss Lee, you must really not leave the piano; now do let us have "She sat beside the mountain spring." I am afraid you will think me very importunate, but I dote upon music.' One incident more, perhaps, is worth relating. Of course I went to see the pointers after their day's work. I found John in the saddle-room, busy with Muffikin's gun. John spoke first with unwonted familiarity, 'Mr. Robert is rather a poor shot, sir, but a nice civil-spoken gentleman,' while all the time his hand kept fumbling in his pocket. I eyed him sternly. I felt that both he and my dogs had been demoralized by a wealthy booby from London. 'John,' said I, 'as soon as you have cleaned that abominable breech-loader you may put Ponto's feet in salt and water.' John moved off at once, and I heard him soon after mutter to the coachman, 'Master's in an awful way about summut,' upon which the other rejoined, 'Name o' dear! it's missis as has been vexing him again. He is under petticoat government, he is.' Well, perhaps my servant tells the truth; but for all that a certain puppy who answers to the name of Robert Muffikin will never again adorn my drawing-room, nor shoot in my twenty-acre piece, even though there should be a row in the camp. For once I will make a stand, so help me the remembrance of my past injuries!

I am, sir, yours respectfully,
BILBURY BLOKE.

GEORGE VENN AND THE GHOST.

WE had been sitting round the fire, rather late at night, some half-dozen of us, talking about ghosts, as people will talk sometimes on winter nights over the fire. We had none of us apparently anything very new to say upon the subject. We were only dealing with tales told at second hand; matters we had heard from others or read of in books; no one pretended to have undergone any personal experiences in connection with ghosts. One man had narrated a curious story touching an apparition said to have been seen by his grandfather; another had to tell about a house, alleged to be haunted, which had at one time been occupied by his uncle. We did not seem to get any nearer to the spirit world than this. We had only 'hearsay' testimony to offer: no evidence bearing upon the question that would have been listened to for a moment in a court of law.

Of course some of our number had been talking a great deal more than the rest. In conversation, as in racing, there are always a few who make all the running, while the rest are content to come in anyhow. But, to continue the figure, it isn't always those who start off with the lead that manage to keep it; their pace slackens, and they drop back, and occasionally some from quite the rear show very respectably in front at the finish.

There was a lull. The talkers had rather exhausted their subject; they had perhaps no great stock of it on hand to draw from. One of our number, who had been sitting a little apart, and somewhat silent, then rose from his chair and approached the fire. With the tongs he lifted a red-hot coal from the grate, and began deliberately to light his pipe. Somehow it happened that as he did this simple thing we all watched him without speaking, as though deeply interested in his movements. Our conversation, I suppose, had inclined us to lay an absurd stress upon trifles. We had started with rather a light treatment of our theme, and had at no time

professed to attach much faith to the various recitals that had been ventured upon concerning supernatural visitations; but gradually, and perhaps unconsciously, we had become more and more held and possessed by our topic. We did not derive strength and support from our numbers, for each man seemed to communicate his weakness to his neighbour: we rather awed and influenced each other, and had at last wrought our nervous systems up to such a pitch of 'receptivity,' that I believe any sudden loud knocking at the door, or the fall of any article of furniture, or the winking or quenching of the gaslights would have occasioned us very acute alarm. In this state of morbid impressibility we looked on raptly intent while George Venn went through the business of lighting his pipe with a hot coal.

'I don't think—you fellows—know much what—you're talking about,' he said, breaking up his observation into little pieces, as it were, by the interjection of puffs from his pipe. He had at all times a habit of speaking calmly and slowly, almost solemnly. Upon the present occasion he was more than ever deliberate, and seemed somehow to force upon us an air of waiting breathlessly for his oracular utterances. 'For all—you've been saying—it doesn't seem to me—that any of you—have really seen—a ghost. Now I HAVE!'

He spoke these last words loudly, and rather imperiously, I thought. He had a deep bass voice, somewhat hollow in tone. Upon the present occasion it seemed to me to possess almost a sepulchral quality. For a moment the hot coal lit up his face with a peculiar red glow; then he enveloped himself in quite a cloud of smoke, through which he stalked back to his chair, all eyes following him with earnest curiosity, and perhaps some apprehension.

I think it must have occurred at the same moment to the other men in the room as well as to me that, all things considered, perhaps George Venn was the most likely of any of

us to have been favoured with personal experiences in relation to the world of ghosts. This idea might have been due to the fact that less was really known about him than about the others, most of whom had been intimately connected with each other from quite schoolboy times, whereas Venn was comparatively a recent acquaintance. He was older than the rest, with a more decided manner; was somewhat taciturn, while we were inclined to be talkative; with no affectation of being *blanc*, he was apt to maintain a deliberate serenity while our spirits were at their highest and wildest—was, indeed, especially quiet and calm when we were most boisterous. But at the same time it must be said of him, that if he never yielded to our exhilaration, so also he never was deeply affected by our depression; and we had the usual juvenile propensity of oscillating with exceeding rapidity between ecstatic joy and abject dependency.

No one knew much about Venn. He was an artist, he had passed the greater part of his life abroad, and was now perhaps thirty years old or so. Within the last few years he had settled in London, and had gradually been introduced into the small group of men—art-students for the most part, and intimate friends—who were now assembled round the fire talking about ghosts. Though we were bound by no rules, and our meetings were the result of little pre-arrangement, and were irregular and accidental enough, we formed, in truth, a sort of club of young men, bound together by similar pursuits and inclinations. We met in each other's studios from time to time, talked art, smoked pipes, discussed each other's achievements and aspirations, had a turn now and then with the gloves or a bout at single-stick, and emptied tumblers of punch. We were decidedly young men, as you will perhaps have already concluded from this report of our proceedings; and we gladly opened our ranks to admit George Venn. He was older, more experienced, was clever, good-tempered, and could give us valuable information about the methods and manners

of continental art and artists. Moreover, the fact that he presented a type of character dissimilar to the general was in itself an urgent reason for his acceptance amongst us with promptness and goodwill.

Yes, decidedly I thought he was the very man to have seen a ghost. The more I considered him, the more I grew fixed in that opinion. Who should have seen a ghost if George Venn had not? That calm manner of his, which nothing seemed to affect—that settled repose, from which nothing could rouse him—those deep, yet hollow tones—those steady, earnest, dark eyes of his—all pertained appropriately to a man who had, it may be, looked into the other world, and was not, therefore, to be startled by the incidents of this—who was, as it were, *en rapport* with the supernatural, and therefore little likely to be affected by the normal occurrences of life. If a stranger of ordinary capacity had been introduced into the room at that moment, and asked to select from among us the man who had seen a ghost, I felt positive that he would have singled out George Venn. The pretensions of the others in such respect were contemptible, compared to Venn's.

Not that his appearance was remarkable, otherwise than by a simplicity of toilet that was perhaps a little studied. We, after the manner of young art-students, were a little prone to eccentricities of dress, to certain fanciful exuberances in our modes of arranging our hair, training our moustaches, and shaping our beards. (We did not all possess those last-named appendages: all, however, affected a growth, more or less downy in quality and slight in quantity, upon the upper lip.) But Venn, if he had ever been subjected to such weaknesses, had now, at any rate, outgrown and got rid of them. He never appeared in the picturesque, brightly-lined, many-buttoned velvet painting-jackets which were favourites with us. He wore generally a simple suit of tweed, and looked rather as though he were going shooting or on a pedestrian expedition than merely to work at his easel. In fact he never seemed

to pose himself as a painter, whereas I think we were fond of attitudinizing a good deal in that character. He had possibly passed through that first stage of excited pride in his profession to which the student is prone. He wore no beard whatever, shaving close; though, to judge by the blue-black shades about his chin and lips, he might, had he so listed, have indulged in hirsute decoration on a most liberal scale. His hair was clipped close, the forelock drooping a little over his broad forehead, something after the fashion made memorable by the first Napoleon. Indeed, now I come to think of it, Venn had a good deal of the straight-ruled brow, the olive complexion, the sunken but steady eyes, and the regularity of feature of the great Emperor. Perhaps, upon the whole, his face was a little more aquiline in mould; while his figure, without being less broad, was taller, and more lithe and sinewy; and he was without the tendency to corpulence which spoilt the contour of *le petit caporal*, especially as he advanced in life.

'You've seen a ghost, Venn?' some one asked. 'Really?'

'I have,' he answered, simply.

'Where?'

'In this studio.'

We received this announcement with quite a gasp of astonishment.

I should have said, perhaps, that we were sitting in Venn's painting-room. We had a habit of meeting now at Frank Ripley's, now at Tom Thoroton's, now at Venn's, now at my studio. There was no settled plan about the thing, no precise invitation issued; but at times a sort of understanding seemed to pervade our small society that on a particular night Frank, or Tom, or George, or Harry, as the case might be, would be in his rooms 'at home,' when men were expected 'to look him up' accordingly. Somehow the information circulated rapidly amongst us. We were too intimate to stand upon much ceremony with each other. No one waited for any further or more official intimation on the subject, but, when the night arrived, forthwith proceeded to his

friend's abode, with unquestioning acceptance of the idea that he would find a host prepared to give him welcome. So it happened that it was in Venn's studio, on Venn's chairs, round Venn's fire, that we met on the evening under mention, smoking Venn's tobacco, drinking Venn's grog, and talking about ghosts in the manner already alluded to.

Now there was this to be said about Venn, that he never did anything quite as anybody else would do it. His arrangements in connection with the practice of his profession were differently ordered to those of other students. We were for the most part content with furnished apartments, improvising as convenient studios as we could; Venn had taken a whole house to himself.

'After all, it costs very little more,' he one day explained in his quiet way, 'while the advantages are enormous. Sometimes I like to be quiet, very quiet; with other people living in the house, you know, that's not possible. Occasionally it happens that I prefer to be noisy, particularly noisy: it occurs to me that I want to ascertain whether I've lost my aim, whether my nerve is steady, and my eye correct; and then I blaze away with my revolver at a mark on the wall for hours, sometimes for days together; or, feeling a passion for exercise, I pile up my furniture, and amuse myself with taking a flying leap over it, or jumping down a whole flight of stairs, coming down sometimes rather loudly and heavily, I can tell you. Other lodgers in the house might reasonably object to that kind of thing. They could no more stand me than I could tolerate them, in fact. We should never agree. We could never come to terms as to being noisy or quiet at quite the same times. In fact, I've tried life in lodgings, and found it a dead failure. The landlady always came up to give me notice to quit just as I was thinking of going down to let her know that I couldn't endure to stop under her roof any longer. So now I'm on a different plan. I've a house of my

own. A man's house is his castle. This is my castle—Venn Castle, if you like; and I can do what I like in it: play the drum or the organ, or leap-frog; fire off anything, from a popgun to an Armstrong; be as quiet as a mouse or noisy as Verdi's orchestra; and there's no one to interfere with me or say me nay. It's a capital good house; wants a great deal doing to it, I admit; in fact, it's terribly out of repair: but then that makes it cheap. I've got it for the fag end of a lease: the landlord won't do anything until the lease falls in; and of course no reasonable—I was going to say no respectable—tenant would take a place upon which he had to spend no end of money to make it decently habitable, especially as he couldn't be certain of having his term renewed. But I'm not particular; it suits me very well. I don't mind cracked ceilings, or broken cornices, or uneven floors; and so long as there are stairs, I don't think banisters matter much; for cobwebs, I'm rather partial to them, and we all know that dirt's picturesque. So here I've pitched my tent, and I shall get on well enough if I can only persuade the public to buy my pictures. After all, that's the main desideratum of an artist's life.

Certainly it was a queer old place, was Venn's Castle, built at a time when London houses were allowed a little more elbow room than at present. The rooms were large and numerous, the entrance wide; it belonged to the days when there were 'halls,' real halls, and not 'passages' merely; the staircase solid and spacious, ascending gently, with large landings, and wooden globes at the corners of the banisters. The house was situate in a street near Soho Square, and had been once the abode of wealth and fashion, no doubt, but these had long since departed, leaving few traces behind them. 'Venn's Castle' was shouldered by public-houses and hucksters' shops: the neighbourhood had, sadly lost caste, and consideration, and money too, I should think. Decidedly it had a very down-at-heel, out-at-elbow,

impecunious, insolvent look. The scavengers didn't do their duty by the street, nor the paving commissioners, if there are such functionaries, nor the gas companies. It was always muddy, the roadway most uneven, and the lamps few and far between, emitting the feeblest of rays. Poverty had taken possession of the precinct, and was left to have its own way, to do its best or its worst there, undisturbed and unassisted. Proceeding to Venn's, you felt sure that you were entering a district certain to be described in parliamentary and registrar-general reports as 'thickly populated and very poor.' The evidence was clear on the subject: to be quite satisfied, you had only to look aloft at the number of bird-cages, at the pigeons perched on the coping-stones or the chimney-stacks, at the vermilioned flower-pots, the bright-green mignonette boxes upon the window-sills, or below at the mangles, to be arrived at down the area steps, and the clothes hanging up to dry in the areas; or all round at the coal-sheds, the beer-shops, the numberless bells on the door-posts, and zinc plates on the doors. And then the tide of children that flooded the streets and broke into waves on the kerb-stones: the children for ever singing shrill choruses, or performing wild dances, or playing strange games, very noisy, and dirty, and ill clad, and bareheaded, wanting, perhaps, fresh air and more food, and yet apparently very happy and high-spirited notwithstanding! Arriving at Venn's door, it was always necessary to break the ranks of a brigade of children drawn up in very close order, and holding possession of the steps against all comers. Having reached the knocker, and obtained entrance into the house, the brigade instantly re-formed in your rear, as though effectually to prevent your retreat by the same road. A thorough conviction must have occupied the minds of the juvenile population that to them belonged, by the right of long custom, Venn's doorsteps a great deal more than to Venn, and that if there was any permission required in the matter, he had to seek

such permission of them rather than they of him.

'You've seen a ghost in this studio, Venn?'

'Certainly I have.'

Now if Venn was a likely man to have seen a ghost, it was not less clear that Venn's studio was the very place of all others in which a ghost—from all one had ever read or heard by tale or history of ghosts—would be likely to make its appearance. It was a large room, so large that it seemed hardly possible by any process of lighting to disperse the gloom that would somehow gather in its corners. Indeed, not the painting-room simply, but every other room in the house, seemed to present itself as a likely and promising haunt for a ghost. Almost everywhere a mysterious murkiness pervaded; projecting masses of wall flung dark shadows, sunken windows starved the light, while dust-crusts sullied it. And then the stairs creaked, the boards started, the wainscot cracked in a way that was certainly rather alarming: especially when you had ones got thoroughly into your mind the notion that the house was haunted. Hitherto, I confess, such an idea had not occurred to me, and I had constantly visited Venn, passing up and down his great staircase, and in and out of his great grim rooms without ever suspecting that ghosts were possibly dogging my steps, or lurking in corners watching my movements, or creeping into nooks and corners to get out of my way. Now, however, I saw the thing from a very different point of view. It was palpable the place was haunted. As I glanced over my shoulder, and round the room—not without, I admit, a vague dread of detecting some horrid object, unperceived before, crouching among the distant shadows—I felt more and more convinced of the fact. We had often laughed at Venn about his cheap house, had made facetious reference to its being in chancery, the property of a lunatic landlord, and so on, but I don't think we had ever hit upon the real truth, now so self-evident, it was beyond all question—Venn had got his house

cheaply because it was haunted, and no one else could be found to live in it.

And yet, after all, there was little enough in the studio; it was simply a large room, barely habitable from the comfortless way in which it was fitted up. Venn carried his views as to the picturesqueness of dirt and litter to quite an excess; he never permitted the dust to be disturbed, or a cobweb to be removed. Some of us were, on the other hand, very dainty about our studios, decking them with carved oak and choice specimens of china and Venetian glass, hangings of mediæval tapestry, cut velvet, or stamped leather, making them as spruce and pretty as a lady's boudoir. Venn denounced all such doings as fopperies and finicking rubbish. 'I hate to be surrounded by things I can smash or spoil. I only want room to turn round and splash my oils or spurt my turps about in. This is a studio, not a hair-cutting saloon. Some of you fellows can't paint unless you have diamond rings on your fingers, and bear's-grease on your hair, and scent on your pocket-handkerchiefs. You'll mix your colours with *cau-de-Cologne*, next. This studio not comfortable! What more do you want? Ar'n't there chairs to sit down upon, and a square of carpet in front of the fire? It is a little ragged, I own; but that's from the hot coals jumping out of the fire now and then, and fellows dropping their fuses about. I'm not going to load the place with gimeracks and furniture, as you do. What good do you get out of them? They only cost money, and absorb the light. There's not too much of either of those articles in this studio, I can tell you.' So he held to his desolate, destitute painting-room, with its few rickety Windsor chairs, its cloudy ceiling and uneven floor, its bare, dingy wainscoting, only ornamented here and there by a 'life study,' or a vague outline in chalk or charcoal; stray canvases resting here and there with their faces turned to the wall, the failures to be found in all studios: inchoate undertakings which the artist can never persuade himself to complete

or destroy thoroughly, but suffers rather to wear out and periah of their own accord, aided by time and dust and damp.

'Well, tell us about this ghost, Venn,' said Tom Thoroton. We had waited for some few minutes, in hopes that Venn would volunteer a narration on the subject. But he did not seem inclined to speak; sat quietly smoking his pipe, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of its well-coloured bowl. It was evident that he required to be stimulated into talking by coaxing and questioning.

'Tell us about this ghost, Venn.'

'What do you want to know about it?' he asked.

'When did you first see it?'

'Not long after I took this house.'

'Weren't you frightened?'

'Well, not exactly frightened. I was vexed and annoyed at first, but I got used to it afterwards; there was nothing so very alarming about it.'

'Did it stay long?'

'Some few days.'

'What! then you saw it by daylight? I thought ghosts never appeared except at night?'

'Ah, it's clear you get your notion of ghosts from the theatre; you're thinking of "his majesty of buried Denmark," and Banquo, and the tent scene in Richard the Third. But the ghosts have changed all that; they take their walks by day now as well as by night.'

'You're joking, Venn.'

'Very well, then, let's change the subject; I didn't start it; and I'm sure I don't want to go on with it.'

But of course we were not going to let the thing drop in that unsatisfactory way. Venn's coyness only piqued our curiosity the more.

'No, no,' I said, 'let's hear all about it, old fellow. Does it come often?'

'Well, no. I couldn't stand it constantly; it would be rather too much of a good thing, you know. A little of it I don't so much mind; but of course it would be terribly in the way of my work if it were here always. I should have to give up the place, in fact.'

'But how often does it come?'

'Well; two or three times a year, say—not more.'

'And stop a few days each time?'

'Exactly.'

'Hanged if I should like it, though,' said Tom Thoroton; and he passed his hand across his forehead. 'It's all very well for you, Venn, to talk in that cool way about it; but I know I should be terribly upset if a ghost were to come and take up his abode in my place for days together. I shouldn't be able to do a stroke of work while it stayed, or to get a wink of sleep, or to eat or drink ever so little.' And Tom Thoroton emptied his tumbler. He looked very white, I thought. He was at all times a young fellow of rather an active imagination.

'One gets used to things,' said Venn, with a philosophical air; 'and I always find that if one's appetite goes away, it comes back again, sure enough. I wish one's money would do the same.'

'Does it come upon you suddenly, or do you know when to expect it?'

'Well, some time before, I have a notion that it will make its appearance.'

'Ah! I see; a presentiment?'

'A presentiment, if you like.'

'A presage of coming misfortune?'

'That, too, if you will have it so. I don't go in for fine language much, myself.'

'You find yourself disturbed in mind; oppressed in an unaccountable way?'

'I find that after certain bad attacks of extravagance and idleness, comes a depression of spirits, and then, the ghost.'

'But you're never low-spirited, Venn?'

'I am, sometimes. But when such misfortune happens to me I know what course to pursue. I keep myself to myself, as people say. I don't victimize my friends. I don't try to pull them down to my low level. I don't want to inoculate every one I meet with my malady. Low spirits are very catching sort of things. A determined man may spread his disorder far and wide among his acquaintances,

if he gives his mind to it. For my part I feel penitent, and a little ashamed; and I lock myself up till I'm better. I don't care to go whining about, making everybody miserable under the pretence of obtaining their sympathy.'

I don't know whether Venn meant it so or not; but this was certainly rather hard upon some of us, who, I own, were a little apt to impart not only our joys but also our griefs, in fact, especially our griefs, to our friends, without much regard to their feelings so long as we obtained some small sense of relief by the proceeding.

'But you're not speaking of a real ghost, Venn, but a sort of apparition of the mind, born of gloom, and idleness, and some irregularity of life, and consequent contrition. Your ghost is only the result of a disordered fancy, weakened nerves, disturbed health.'

'Nothing of the kind,' said Venn, quietly. 'I'm speaking of a real ghost, tangible, unmistakable, who comes into this studio, and sits in that chair for long, long hours together.'

He pointed to the 'sitter's' chair, raised on a dais, the usual studio property. Of course we all turned to look at the chair, following his hand as he pointed to it, almost expecting to see the ghost then and there occupying that seat of vantage. No ghost was there, however.

'By George! it must be very awful,' said Tom Thoroton, in a moved voice. 'Fancy a ghost coming into a fellow's studio, and sitting down there for hours together! By George! enough to drive a fellow mad.'

'As I said before, Tom, it's annoying until one gets accustomed to it.'

'Is the ghost—a woman?' asked Frank Ripley.

'No, Frank—you needn't grin—not a woman; not at all like a woman.'

Frank Ripley's organ of veneration was by no means well developed. It was no laughing matter that we were discussing. Perhaps in truth he was only laughing—as the scoffer will sometimes laugh—to conceal his fears.

'Not a woman, Frank, nor anything so very awful, Tom. I'm not setting up to be tremendous in the way of nerve and pluck. But the ghost doesn't come to me in an alarming form; it is, on the contrary, a simple, unpretending ghost enough, is quiet and pacific in its nature and demeanour, seems indeed anxious to give me as little trouble as possible under the circumstances.'

'What form does it take then?'

'That of a little wizened old man in a shabby long brown great-coat, with a red comforter round his neck.'

'Why then——' I began.

'What have you got to say on the subject?' Venn inquired rather sharply, I fancied.

'Why, don't you remember? I called on you one day—there was some difficulty about my seeing you, but I was let in at last—and there was some one sitting here, answering that description: a little old man in a long brown coat, with a comforter round his neck; he was sitting quietly in that chair: he didn't speak a word—in fact, I don't remember that he moved.'

'When was it?'

'Not long after Christmas.'

'Ah! yes, I remember now. Well, that was the ghost that haunts this house.'

'By Jove! then I've seen him.'

I took a new interest in myself. I was master of an extraordinary experience. I also had seen a ghost. That seeing it, I didn't at the time know it to be a ghost was a little disappointing, I admit; yet in truth it did not materially affect the question.

'Then I've seen him!' I became an object of attention to the whole room.

'Let us have no more scepticism about this matter,' said Venn, almost hilarious in his 'triumph.' 'No more talk about nerves, and fancy, and bad health—that sort of thing. The story doesn't rest upon my credit solely; unlooked-for evidence has turned up quite at the right moment. The ghost has been seen by other eyes than mine.'

'But I say, weren't you frightened,

old fellow? Tom Thoroton inquired of me.

'Well, not so much as you might fancy, Tom; because, don't you see, I never thought about the man being a ghost. In fact, he didn't look the least like a ghost—that is to say, according to one's preconceived ideas as to what a ghost should look like. No more like a ghost than I look, or you, for that matter—not so much as you, perhaps, Tom, for you're looking uncommonly white to-night, old man.'

'What! the ghost was sitting there, and you didn't know that it was a ghost?'

'No; I thought the old man was a model. In fact, I think Venn said he was a model. Certainly he made a sketch of him.'

'You made a sketch of the ghost, Venn? they all exclaimed in amazement.

'Yes, a very slight thing,' he said.

'By George, you *have* a nerve!' cried Tom Thoroton, admiringly.

'Here's the sketch,' said Venn, as he took a millboard from a corner of the room. 'It's flimsy enough, and a little too low in tone; but it was done on a very dark day. It will give you some idea of the man. I described him as a model, because—well—because,' he explained, half-laughing, 'I thought it would be pleasant for all parties that his real character should not be revealed; it saved a great deal of awkwardness and troublesome explanation; nothing could be more embarrassing, I should think, than a formal introduction to a ghost, as a ghost; it was better to regard him for the nonce in the light of an ordinary human being. I'm sure he was grateful to me for so considering him. You're not afraid to look at the drawing, Tom? That can't hurt you, at all events.'

We all looked at the drawing. Certainly there was nothing very remarkable about it. It was very slight, in oils; thinly painted, and sketchily treated: not well-defined—hardly made out at all in places. Yet undoubtedly it bore a decided resemblance to the old man I had seen in the studio.

'Still, I wonder at your nerve,' persisted Tom Thoroton.

'Well, you see, Tom, I'm a practical sort of fellow. Given a ghost in your studio, the question arises how to utilize him? Well, why not make a study of him? It always is good practice to make sketches and studies of any and everything. The thing's very simple.'

'Did the ghost make any objection?'

'Not the least in the world. He was rather pleased at the idea—was flattered—glad to be of use. Ghosts, it seems to me, have a good many of the weaknesses of the flesh, and they are not nearly so black, or for that matter so white as they are often painted. For instance, the ghost in question was very happy to make himself at home. I begged him to do so, and he complied. He was even so accommodating as to smoke a pipe with me.'

'He smoked a pipe!' we all exclaimed.

'Fancy smoking a pipe with a ghost!' cried Tom Thoroton in a scared voice.

'Yes; here's the identical pipe! I put it on one side for him in case he should want it again.' And Venn took from the high mantelpiece a long clay 'churchwarden.' We all examined it with deep interest, though of course it was a fac-simile of thousands of other 'churchwardens.' But then a pipe which had been smoked by a ghost was naturally a curiosity, of its kind almost unique.

'He smoked! Did he talk?'

'Yes. But he was not a ghost of any great conversational powers. He did his best, however, to make himself agreeable. I think he appreciated my method of treating him, which was decidedly polite. I flatter myself I'm polite to every one. Why should I alter my usual line of conduct in the presence of a ghost? I was polite to him and considerate. I endeavoured to make his abode here, while it lasted, as agreeable as I could to both of us. I fancy in other haunts he meets with a less pleasant reception. When you come to think of it, you know, people generally are really very rude to

ghosts. Instead of treating them with any sort of respect, they stare at them, scream at them, call them names, such as "horrible shadow," "unreal mockery," "goblin damned;" apply to them other equally offensive epithets, and sometimes go into convulsive fits, or faint right off at the sight of them. Well, you know that's really not pleasant to the ghost, and a ghost [has his feelings like anybody else—places him, indeed, in a very awkward and painful position. He doesn't want to disturb the peace of families, or to do any harm really. He only asks to be let alone. Perfect quiet is much more congenial to him than indecent uproar and alarm. If his appearance is not attractive, that's hardly to be considered as his fault. If his presence is objectionable, he can't very well help that. I'll undertake to say he doesn't really want to be wandering about to and fro upon the earth, making himself unpleasant. He'd much prefer sitting quietly at home—wherever that may be—if he could have altogether his own way in the matter.]

'This is all very well, you know, Venn; but if the ghost were to come in now, you wouldn't like it.'

'I quite admit it, Frank. I should dislike it very much. Still, I trust I should know how to behave with a proper regard for the decencies of life. A ghost understands seemly behaviour; while for good manners I'm convinced that ghosts have quite as good manners, as—well, let us say picture-dealers.'

'But are you sure this is a ghost, Venn? Are there no other lodgers in the house?'

'None, only the old woman—my housekeeper—who let you fellows in and who'll let you out, presently; there's no hurry.'

'But how do you account for this ghost?'

'Ah, that's a very grave question (I don't mean a pun). I may have a notion myself on the subject.'

'Well, what is it?'

'No. I won't state it just at present. I should like to hear first what is the usual theory about ghosts. Can any one tell me?—in a few words, of course. No one wants to

have a long lecture on the subject.'

'Well. A man dies with something on his mind, consequently his spirit can get no rest, but continues to haunt the earth,' explained Tom Thoroton.

'And that something on his mind?'

'Well, let us say that in his lifetime he has hidden a treasure, which remains undiscovered; he has died suddenly without time to make a revelation on the subject. Perhaps for want of the money his family are in great distress, so he can't rest quiet, but haunts the place where his treasure lies secreted. Plenty of ghost stories run like that. There may be some treasure hidden beneath the floor of this room.'

'If I thought it I'd soon have the boards up and secure it. But I don't believe a word of it. The only treasure in this room amounts to about fifteen and fourpence, which I have here'—Venn slapped his pocket as he spoke. 'Only fifteen and fourpence—and I owe—well, never mind how much I owe. Of course I don't include in my calculation such small coin as you fellows may have in your pockets. Your money can't be said in any way to pertain to the room. No, Tom; I can't admit your explanation about the buried treasure. It's too improbable. A buried treasure in a studio! Impossible!'

'But it needn't be a buried treasure,' cried Thoroton; 'ghosts haunt places for other reasons than that. Instance, a sin committed, unatoned for, unavenged.'

'Ah!' Venn seemed to think this explanation more reasonable. 'But what sort of a sin? Something rather strong in that way, of course?'

'Well, say a bigamy!' Thoroton exclaimed rather at random. 'I fancy he had been reading a good many sensation novels of late.'

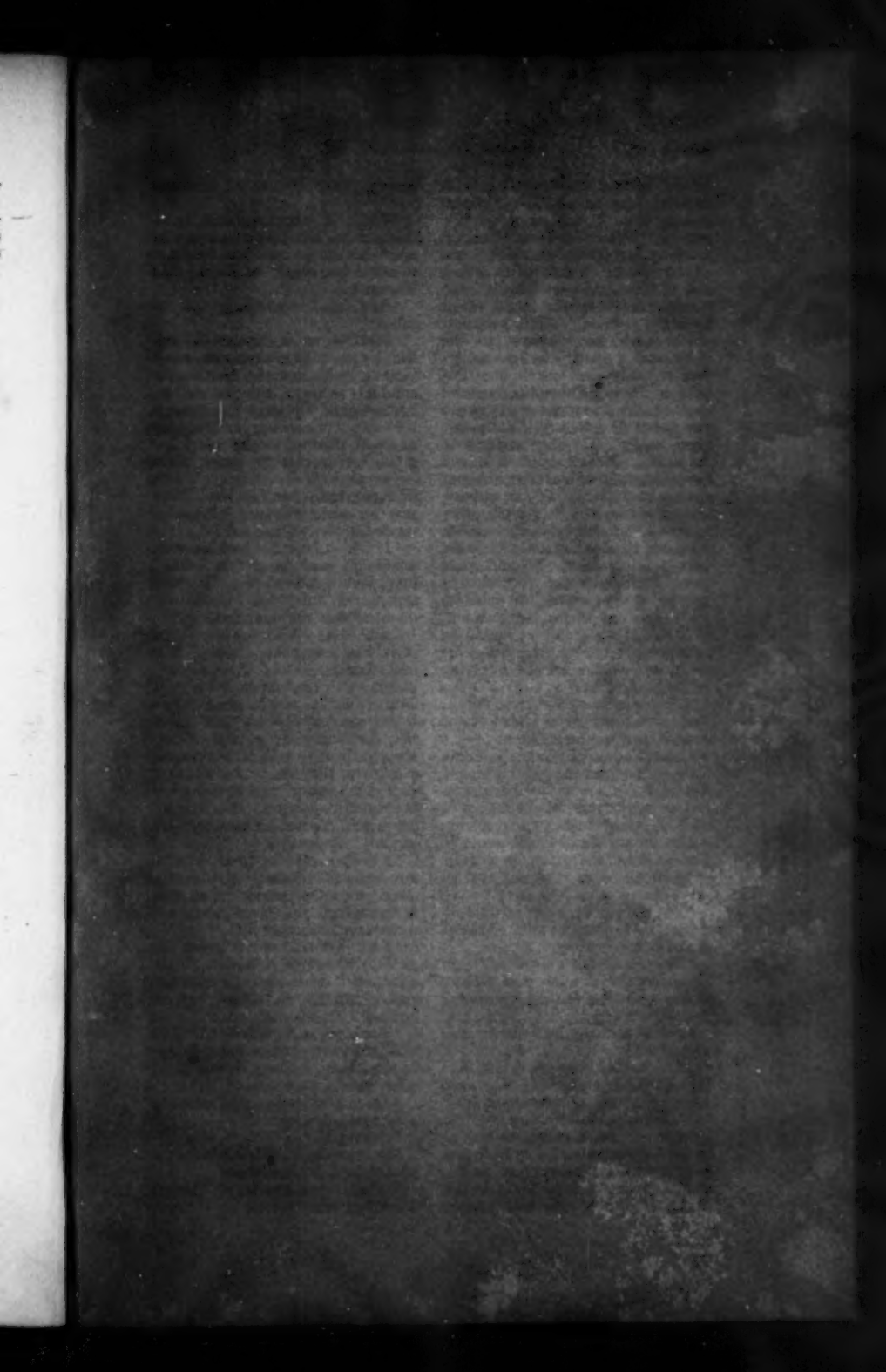
'Or a forgery!' suggested someone.

'Or embezzlement!'

'Or arson!'

'Or murder!' Then there was silence for a few minutes.

'What do you say, Venn?' Thoroton asked breathlessly.





GEORGE VERN AND THE GHOST.

Illustrated by J. A. Harrison.

'No. Not murder, I should think; Tom. Not murder exactly, but rather an execution.'

'The question!' we all shouted.

'Ask! Ask that in "Les Trois Muses sautes," perhaps!' cried Tom Thornton, breathlessly.

John Venn could answer, there came a loud single knock at the door. We were instantly silent.

'Come in,' said Venn.

There was a shuffling sound, the door opened slowly—very slowly—and then a figure appeared, advanced into the room, and stood amongst us.

It was the ghost!

I think we were all frightened. I know I was; and we had real cause for alarm. There was no mistake about it. The new comer was the little old man I had once before seen in Venn's studio, not knowing him to be a ghost: it was the little wisen old man in the long brown coat and the red confidante, a sketch of whose portrait Venn had just showed us. We looked at the ghost, then at each other, then at the ghost again, then at Venn. What white faces we all had! from the glare of the gas, of course.

Even Venn was disturbed, I could see; though he made an effort to conceal or to overcome his emotion. He made a step forward to where the figure of this little old man was standing.

'You'll think me very late, I'm afraid,' said the ghost, in an odd, quivering voice. He made a bow as he spoke—a bow that was almost grotesque in its exceeding obsequiousness. I remember thinking at the time.

'Well, it's late,' said Venn, with a forced air of not caring about the thing.

'Longer late than never, you know, Mr. Venn,' observed the ghost.

'I don't quite see that,' said Venn, with towards coolness. He must have had a very critical turn of mind. Facing taking an objection to the ghost's simple citation of a popular proverb! How Thornton marvelled at him!

'I'm afraid I'm disturbing you, and these good guests,' and the ghost glanced round at us with a queer

smile. What a sparkle—quite a supernatural sparkle—there was in his little round black eyes! And then—the same it gazed upon all of us to be called guests by a ghost!

'Show me anywhere if I'm at all in the way. There isn't no need, you know, Mr. Venn, to be particular to a shade,' said the ghost.

'By George, though,' answered Tom Thornton. 'I thought ghosts talked better English than that!'

'Only you know, Mr. Venn, the other parts of the house isn't over and above blessed. Still, I'm accustomed to it, I am; and if it's inconvenient for me to come by here at the present moment, why I don't mind either down on the stairs out with a broom or two, or only good, but's not, I think, necessary, to disturbing the property, even so there is, and he looked round the room, not reverently, I thought, in regard to its few contents. 'You've always believed the thorough gentleman to me, Mr. Venn, and I will not suppose you intend and wanting the answer, it would be 'and if I weren't to accommodate' his as long as time, wouldn't it not, even if I had a ladder raised at my feet.'

'Well, Mr. Venn,' there was a silence as the ghost made only bow, and ended. We seemed all stirred by a common desire to get away from Venn's studio at once, at no night.

'Stop!' cried Venn, in some excitement, the tone of his voice very hollow and solemn, and yet with a sort of desire to laugh, twitching about his lips as he spoke.

'You mustn't go like this. The unforeseen circumstance that has occurred threw upon me an expectation, though I had not anticipated giving any. Some one has now suggested that there has been a reader committed to the answer. I proposed by way of amusement to substantiate the word *ghost*. That is the truth, the real truth, gentlemen. There has been an execution in this house. In point of fact there have been more executions in this house; and there was execution in this house at the present moment.

GEORGE AND HIS TWO GUARDS



'No. Not murder, I should think, Tom. Not murder exactly, but rather an execution!'

'An execution!' we all shouted.

'Ah! Like that in "*Les Trois Mousquetaires*," perhaps!' cried Tom Thoroton, breathlessly.

Before Venn could answer, there came a loud single knock at the door. We were instantly silent. 'Come in,' said Venn.

There was a shuffling sound, the door opened slowly—very slowly—and then, a figure appeared, advanced into the room, and stood amongst us.

It was the ghost!

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'You'll think me very late, I'm afraid,' said the ghost, in an odd, quavering voice. He made a bow as he spoke—a bow that was almost grotesque in its exceeding obsequiousness, I remember thinking at the time.

'Well, it is late,' said Venn, with a forced air of not caring about the thing.

'Better late than never, you know, Mr. Venn,' observed the ghost.

'I don't quite see that,' said Venn, with tolerable coolness. He must have had a very critical turn of mind. Fancy taking an objection to the ghost's simple citation of a popular proverb! How Thoroton marvelled at him!

'I'm afraid I'm disturbing you, and these good gents,' and the ghost glanced round at us with a queer

smile. What a sparkle—quite a supernatural sparkle—there was in his little round black eyes! And then—I'm sure it grated upon all of us to be called *gents* by a ghost!

'Stow me anywheres if I'm at all in the way. There ain't no need, you know, Mr. Venn, to be pertikler to a shade,' said the ghost.

('By George, though,' murmured Tom Thoroton, 'I thought ghosts talked better English than that!')

'Only you know, Mr. Venn, the other parts of the 'ouse ain't over and above 'abitable. Still, I'm accommodatin', I am; and if it's ill-convenient for me to come in here at the present moment, why I don't mind sittin' down on the stairs outside for a hour or two—only mind, fair's fair; no larks, *fain smuggings*; no disturbing the property, such as there is,' and he looked round the room, not reverently, I thought, in regard to its few contents. 'You've always behaved the thorough gen'l-man to me, Mr. Venn, that I will say: tipping me liberal and treating me 'andsome, it would be 'ard if I couldn't be accommodatin' for a hour or two; wouldn't it now, gents?' and he looked round at us again.

'We'll go, Venn.' There was a general movement towards our hats and coats. We seemed all stirred by a common desire to get away from Venn's studio as quickly as we might.

'Stop,' cried Venn, in some excitement, the tones of his voice very hollow and solemn, and yet with a sort of desire to laugh twitching about his lips as he spoke.

'You mustn't go like this. The unforeseen circumstance that has occurred forces upon me an explanation, though I had not contemplated giving any. Some one just now suggested that there had been a murder committed in this house. I proposed by way of amendment to substitute the word *execution*. That is the truth, the real truth, gentlemen. There *has* been an execution in this house. In point of fact there have been many executions in this house; and there *is* an execution in this house at the present moment.

Moreover, my 'old acquaintance here, the ghost, is no other than—a man in possession.'

'A man in possession!' we echoed.

'Yes; and he haunts me, and this house, soon after, quarter-day, especially. My landlord has a great regard for me as his tenant, but he is ridiculously punctilious on the subject of the receipt of his rent. I have a great respect for him, as a landlord; but I concede that, owing to circumstances over which I have no control, and to which I will not further allude, I am oftentimes not quite so well prepared to pay my rent as doubtless I ought to be. The result generally is—an execution, and the presence of my friend here, in the character of a man in possession. It's one of the inconveniences of having a house all to oneself—an inconvenience that is amply compensated for by the many advantages of the arrangement. I have already referred to them. I said just now that, after bad attacks of extravagance and idleness, came depression of spirits; and then—the ghost. In plainer words, I don't work, and I get into debt. I don't

pay my rent, and the landlord puts in an execution, and I am haunted by my friend here—a very worthy old person in his way,—who's presently going to smoke a pipe, and have a glass of grog with me, as he's done before now. But he'll go out on Monday, when I shall receive money enough to satisfy all outstanding claims, my landlord's among the rest. Why hurry away? This is a "most honest ghost; that let me tell you." Come, another tumbler all round. Why not? That's right. Don't talk about spirits any more; but put them in your glasses and drink them—properly diluted, of course, and with a little sugar and lemon.'

It was evident that, in considering George Venn, we had entirely failed to appreciate one element in his character. He possessed an inclination for humour and practical jesting beyond anything we had ever given him credit for. But then—the fact has been already stated—we were all very young men; and perhaps our conduct occasionally rendered us particularly open to jocose comment and criticism.

D. C.



END OF VOL. VIII.



Drawn by O. W. Cope, R.A.]

OVER THE SNOW.

[See the Story.]

LONDON SOCIETY.

The Christmas Number

FOR

1865.

THE EDITOR'S CHRISTMAS GREETING.



There is someone at the door—
I say it loud!
Get the glass
Of the window-pane washed,
To see
Who it is.
While we welcome in the day
Christmas-time!

Here the path lay to the fire,
From a log
The smoke
To the bright grate-mouth flared,
And now
To the hearth
Hear the clatter across the hearth
Of the fire!

Wherefore, friends, come in
To meet them
All our kin
We have spent long and late
Long and late,
Till each one
And the path has been weary
With the year!

For our guests will be many,
The old and
Will be many
On the glade's green way,
Where we meet
Will be many
But the guests are all the same,
All the same!

LONDON SOCIETY.

The Christmas Number

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1865.

THE EDITOR'S CHRISTMAS GREETING.



*There's a summons at the door :—
Fling it wide !
Let the glow
Of the dancing flames inside
Redly pour
O'er the snow,
While we welcome in the holy
Christmastide !*

*Bring the yule log to the fire :—
Pile it high !
Let it blaze
Till the bright sparks madly fly
And expire
In the haze,
Hanging gloomily across the mid-
night sky.*

*Welcome freely, every one,
To our cheer !
All our best
We have spread before you here—
Song and fun,
Tale and jest,
And the pathos that will summon
sigh and tear !*

*For our pages, well we know,
Far and wide
Will be read,—
On the globe's remoter side,
Where no snow
Will be shed,
But the summer sun will shine, this
Christmastide.*

*B

*Ay! and where, 'mid snow and frost,
Ice and cold,
Nearer home,
There are sons of Britain bold,
Tempest-tost*

*On the foam,—
Or encamped on lonely peak and
wailing wold.*

*Where from jungles issues forth
Ganges' head—
Where the breast
Of St. Lawrence is outspread:—
South and North,
East and West,
This our greeting shall by English
eyes be read.*

*And you, who pencil ply,
Or wield pen,
In our ranks—
Gentle ladies, gallant men!—
Not past by
In our thanks,
Take the wishes of the season once
again!*

*Merry Christmas unto all!
Peace and health,
Joy and mirth,
With content and store of wealth,*

*Each befall
On this earth,
With cares only, that are blessings
come by stealth.*

*There's a summons at the door:—
Who comes here?
Welcome, king
Of all kindness and good cheer!
Evermore
Let us sing,
For lo! where good old Christ-
mas draweth near!*

*Shake the snow from out your beard.
Sit you down,
Welcome guest!
With your glistening holly crown,
King revered
By each breast!
And in merriment all sorrow we
will drown.*

*For good tidings on this day—
Long ago—
Unto man
Rang across the silent snow:—
Glad were they—
Thus they ran—
'Joy in Heaven, and peace to mor-
tals here below!'*

WHAT CAME OF KILLING A RICH UNCLE ONE CHRISTMAS TIME.

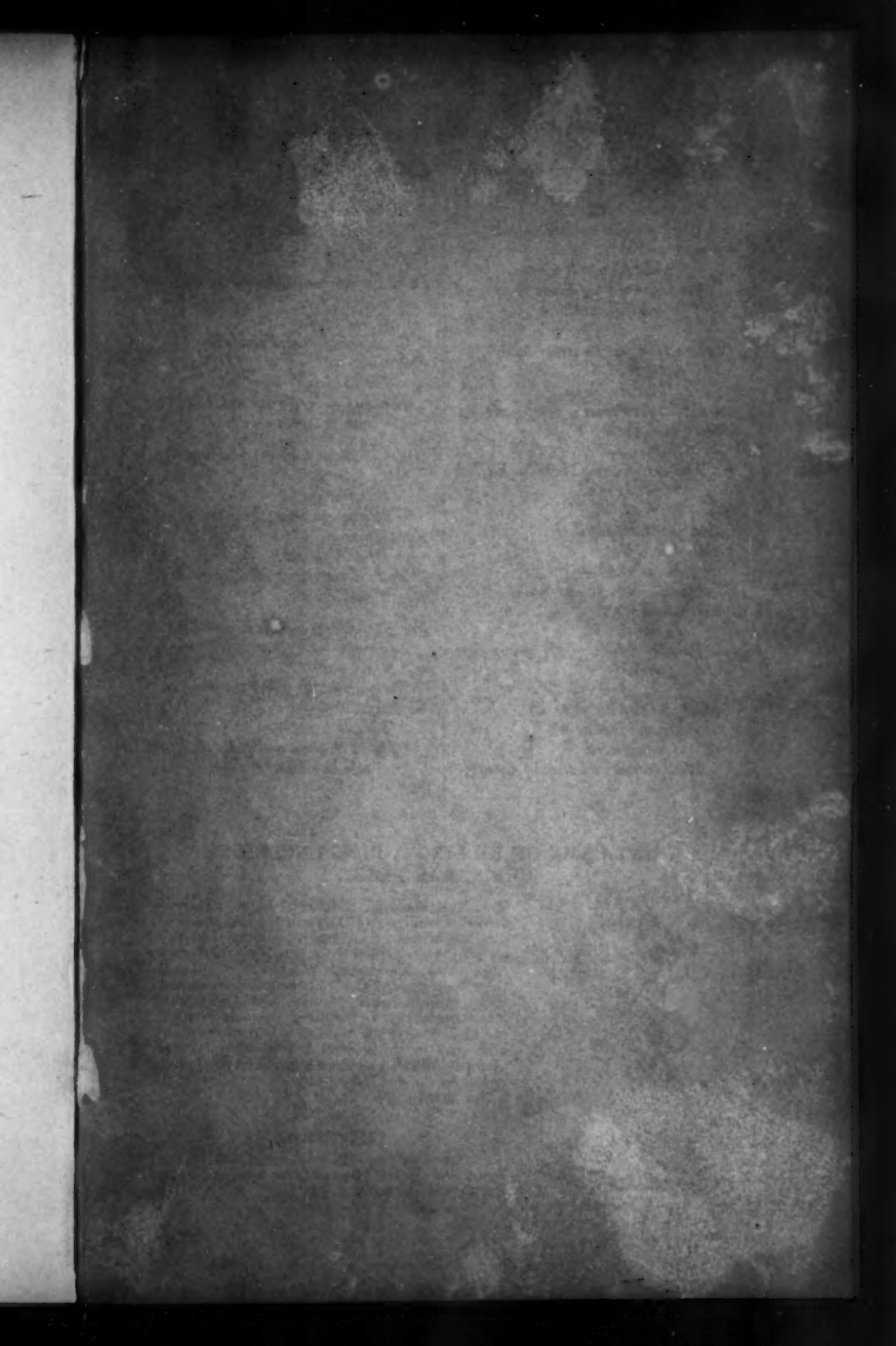


IF it understood, Mr. Editor, if you require confirmatory evidence of the truth of all the facts of this Christmas story, we at once declare our inability to satisfy you; neither will we tell you how they came to our knowledge. We have not invented them, be assured of that, although we have decked them out in holly and mistletoe, and other Christmas associations, as befitting the season when 'London Society' is making due preparation to bear part in the general festival of peace and goodwill instituted eighteen hundred and sixty-five years ago.

Now to our story.

CHAPTER I.

'Dance with me, Letty Green,' said George Poynter to a pretty girl with blue eyes, and 'hair that shamed the morn.'





"Depicts by Charles S. Keene."

WHAT CAME OF KILLING A RICH UNCLE ONE CHRISTMAS TIME.

[See the Story.]



Illustrated by Charles D. Meade.

WAS IT WISE OF KILLING A BIRD UNCLE AND CHRISTMAS TIME.

[The Saturday]

Her ample ball-dress was of the purest white muslin, fastened at the sleeves and round the waist with blue ribbon—bluer than her eyes.

'Yes,' answered Letty, 'I want to dance with you.'

And the music striking up, the young couple made the most of it, to the occasional demerement of less determined terpsichoreans.

The dance at an end, Letty tried to smooth her golden curls into order with her little hands, and then, opening her pretty blue eyes to their full, said:

'George Poynter, I should like some orange.'

'Yes, Letty,' said the young gentleman addressed; 'and there's lemonade, and negus, and such a sponge-cake!'

Letty thought that sponge-cake and lemonade would be more acceptable than orange *pur et simple*, and her partner fought his way bravely through the crowd surrounding the refreshment-table, and returned with the desired delicacies.

'I like dancing with you better than any one, Letty,' said George to his pretty partner.

'Do you? Why?' replied Letty, her voice rather obstructed by the sponge-cake.

'I think it is because I like you—you are so pretty,' replied the young gallant.

'You mustn't say that, or mamma will scold you, Georgy. She scolds every one who tells me I am pretty,' said the young lady.

But the words had been spoken, and from that night until the end of the Christmas holidays George and Letty said they were sweethearts.

CHAPTER II.

Some four or five years had passed, and Letty Green and her mamma were sitting together under the verandah of their pretty cottage, working, and talking of a pleasant day they had spent at Mr. Poynter's, when Master George came, he said, to bid them good-bye, as he was returning to school on the following morning.

'And I want to ask you a favour, Mrs. Green, and Letty a favour,' said George, colouring slightly.

Mrs. Green would grant it of course, and so would Letty, if she could.

'I want Letty to ride Rufus, my pony, whilst I am at school. Papa has no use for it, and it carries a lady beautifully.'

But to accept this proposal would give so much trouble.

'Not in the least. Tom—that's our groom—says it won't, and papa says it won't, and I say the same; so please say you'll use the pony. Straps, the harness-maker, will lend a side-saddle.'

Mrs. Green accepted George's offer, as Letty was rather fragile, and pony-riding had been declared to be good for her; but Mrs. Green's income would not allow of the expense, she said. There were people who called Mrs. Green a mean woman, and hinted that she loved money better than her child.

George Poynter went to school very cheery, because he had made such a capital arrangement about his pony, and he often thought, when the weather was fine, of Rufus, and wondered if Letty were riding him. George had not forgotten, perhaps, that years—years ago he and Letty had called themselves sweethearts.

CHAPTER III.

More years had passed, and brought their changes. George and Letty were alone together in a small book-room in Mrs. Green's house, the windows opening to the garden. George was attired in deep mourning, and there were strips of black ribbon here and there on Letty's white dress. They had been talking of death and sorrow until both had become silent. After a time Letty took George's hand, and said:

'Dear George, you must strive to meet your great affliction with a brave spirit—indeed, you must.'

'I have—I do strive,' replied George, looking away from Letty; 'but remember what has come to me. Two years ago my mother died. A year ago that villain Jackson ruined my father—broke his heart—killed him. O, Letty! what have I done to deserve this! What can I do?'

'Trust still to the Father of the fatherless,' replied Letty. 'We do not know why great afflictions are permitted to overtake us, any more than we can tell why great good comes to us when we least expect or deserve it, dear George. You are young, clever, good, and have many friends, and one—who is more than a friend.'

She raised George's hand to her lips when she had said this (they were true sweethearts now), and he—what could he do but press her to his bosom, and kiss her cheek burning with blushes?

Mrs. Green had been walking in the garden, evidently busy with her thoughts.

She had stopped near the book-room window, near enough to hear what the sweethearts were saying to each other, and she appeared to be made more thoughtful by what she heard.

When Mr. Poynter was a thriving merchant, Mrs. Green had been more than a consenting party to her daughter's acceptance of George Poynter's attentions—indeed, she had by several indirect means encouraged the young people to think lovingly of each other. But now matters were changed. Master George, as he was generally called, had neither houses nor lands, nor had he 'ships gone to a far countrie,' and Mrs. Green was perplexed how to act. She knew that Letty loved her first sweetheart, and would perhaps love him more now that he was poor. Girls are very perverse sometimes, and will not see with their mothers' eyes, which look upon Love only with respect when the little gentleman has a good wardrobe and a balance at his banker's. Mrs. Green therefore was perplexed when she heard what the sweethearts had said to each other, and conjectured how they were 'signing and sealing' some loving contract, when silence prevailed in the little book-room.

Mrs. Green was relieved from her perplexity more agreeably than she deserved to have been, as George Poynter called the next day, bringing with him a letter from his uncle, rich old Silas Cheeseman, promising to provide for his only sister's only son, and hinting that George might by good conduct look to be heir to all his thrifty savings.

Silas was a bachelor, having been blighted in his youth. He then took to loving money, and had been a most successful wooer, as those clever people who know everybody's business but their own declared old Silas Cheeseman to be worth his hundred thousand pounds—'more or less, as the case might be.'

Uncle Silas had also procured a situation for George in the neighbouring town of St. Gnats—merely a probationary situation, as clerk to a timber-merchant who was under pecuniary obligations to Silas. All this was very cheering, and very kind of Uncle Silas, although Mr. Bawk, the timber-merchant, was indelicate enough to surmise that George was placed in his establishment as a spy, and to watch the interests of his uncle. George would have scorned such a position for all Uncle Silas had to give or to leave behind him.

CHAPTER IV.



BEFORE we pass on to the events of the next few years, we will introduce Chauncey Gibbs, a friend of George Poynter, of whom we have yet made no mention.

Chauncey—his patronym of Gibbs was rarely mentioned—Chauncey was a good-natured, good-for-nothing,

unsettled, amusing fellow, who contrived to live a gipsy kind of life on 200*l.* a-year, steadfastly refusing to encumber himself with any employment or to incur responsibilities more (to quote Chauncey) than his hat would cover. He was a native of St. Gnats and known to everybody in the town, but he had no regular abiding place, as he chose to wander at will; and George Poynter would not have been surprised to have received one of Chauncey's brief letters dated from London, Paris, Vienna, or Pekin. He mostly affected England, however, and London especially in the winter. When money was scarce Chauncey walked, when he was in funds he availed himself of any cheap conveyance which offered, sometimes never inquiring its destination, but making himself equally at home wherever he was stranded. At Christmas time he always returned to St. Gnats, and was a welcome guest at many hospitable tables in that thriving town, making his headquarters, however, with his old friend and school chum, George Poynter. He had written to announce his return to St. Gnats for the Christmas approaching the end of the two years which had intervened since George Poynter had assumed the stool of office at Mr. Bawk's, and supplies of tobacco and bitter beer were already secured for the welcome, expected guest.

Chauncey had a favourite lounge in London, a tobaccoist's in an out-of-the-way street in the neighbourhood of St. Mary Axe.

The proprietor was a Beadle, or some official of that character, to one of the companies, and the tobacco business was conducted during the early part of the day by the beadle's wife and daughter. It was Chauncey's pleasure to sit on a

snuff-tub in front of the counter and smoke, in turn, all the varieties of tobacco sold at the Beadle's, beguiling the time, also, with animated conversations with the daughter, whose powers of repartee were more ready than refined. It is not our intention to chronicle more than Chauncey's parting interview and what came of it, as slang from a woman's lips is our abhorrence.

Chauncey was about to leave the shop

after one of his long sittings, when the younger lady said :

' You won't see me again, I expect, Mr. Chauncey ; I'm going to be married.'

' You married !' exclaimed Chauncey, as though such an event had been the most unlikely thing that could have happened.

' Yes, me ; why not, I should like to know?' asked the lady, a little piqued.

' I'm sure I envy the happy man,'



replied Chauncey. ' It's not the Scotchman at the shop door, is it?'

' Well, I'm sure!' said the young lady, and without another word she bounced into the little parlour at the back of the shop.

' Now you've regularly offended Becky,' said Mrs. Beadle, 'and such old friends as you was—and she to be married to-morrow, and so respectable.'

' Well, I'm glad to hear that,' said Chauncey. ' Where's the wedding to be. I'll buy a bundle of watercresses and strew her way into church as an apology for my rudeness.'

' Oh! she won't want no apology from you—she knows what you are, Mr. Chauncey; but she's to be married at ten to-morrow, at St. Mary Axe's, but we don't want it spoke of, as the bride-

groom's nervous,' said Mrs. Beadle in a whisper.

'I'll be there in time,' replied Chauncey. 'I suppose her father will give her away—in full costume, cocked hat, staff, and all that.'

'He will do all things that is proper, Mr. Chauncey,' said Mrs. Beadle with much dignity; and Becky at that moment calling 'Mother!' in rather an hysterical tone, Chauncey was allowed to find his way out of the shop as he pleased.

On the following morning Chauncey was at the church of St. Mary Axe a quarter of an hour before the time appointed for the ceremony which was to unite Miss Beadle and somebody to their lives' end.

A hale old gentleman between sixty and seventy, perhaps, was the next arrival. Having made some very confidential communication to the old pew-opener, he was conducted, evidently in great trepidation, to the vestry, and there immured until the arrival of the tobaccoist and family,—but without the emblematical Scotchman. Chauncey concluded, therefore, that Miss Beadle had captivated the old gentleman now awaiting his doom in the condemned cell called the Vestry.

The Beadle was in *mytti*, but his costume still partook of the splendour of his office, and a canary-coloured waistcoat with glittering buttons of ruby glass rendered him somewhat conspicuous even in the gloom of St. Mary Axe. His general expression and bearing was that of a tempered indignation, as though he were about to consent to the infliction of some injury which he could avoid if he pleased. A word, a look, might have provoked him to have torn the license from the parson's hands and to have dragged his daughter from the altar. He was therefore allowed to walk up the aisle unmolested.

Mrs. Beadle was very lively on her entrance to the church—more lively, perhaps, than black tea and the occasion warranted; but whatever had been the stimulating cause of her cheerfulness, it ran in plentiful drops from her eyes as she approached the altar, and must have been exhausted entirely by the end of the ceremony. Noble weeping for her children would have been a dry nurse compared with Mrs. Beadle.

Miss Beadle was resigned, as became her to be at thirty-one. With closed eyes, and drooping head she leaned upon her mother's arm, until, with pardonable confusion, she released her hand to put up her parasol as she drew near the

altar. Chauncey rushed to her relief, and with some difficulty possessed himself of the encumbrance; and as there were no attendant bridesmaids, the impudent fellow attached himself to the wedding party, to be, as he said, 'generally useful and to pick up the pieces.'

The ceremony proceeded with all proper solemnity, but there was some association with the name of one of the contracting parties which made Chauncey fairly start, and then determine to witness the signing of the certificate, to satisfy a doubt which had suddenly entered his mind.

The wedding party retired to the vestry when 'Amazement' had ended the ceremony, and proceeded to sign the registers attesting the union which had just been solemnized. Mr. Chauncey Gibbs being, as he said, a friend of the family, signed also, and there read—what had better be revealed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V.

Any one had only to have walked down the High Street of St. Gualts to have known that Christmas was at hand. The grocers' windows were overrunning with lusciousness; the butchers' shops were so choke full of beef and mutton that the butchers themselves would have to cut their way out into the street; the poulterers had laid in such stocks of turkeys, geese, and chickens, that Mr. Babbage's calculating machine could alone have computed them—mere human intellect would have failed. The window frames of the houses seemed sprouting with holly and 'the ivy green,' and no doubt but mistletoe hung, kiss-provoking, within.

Mrs. Green had made every room in her cottage an anagram of her name, as it was holly-decked everywhere. Nor was the sacred bough forgotten—'on the young people's account' she said, 'though Letty and George had long ceased to want an excuse for a kiss.' All promised a merry Christmas time to come, but promises, we know, are not always realized.

George Poynter was waiting the arrival of his friend Chauncey Gibbs. A glorious fire blazed within the grate; the table was spread to welcome the coming guest, for whose delectation a faultless rumpsteak pie was browning in the oven. The train, punctual to its time, was heard screaming into the station close by, and in a few minutes after the two friends were together.

If you are hungry it is tantalizing to

listen to the particulars of a dinner you are not to share; if you are sated, you are bored by the recapitulation of dainties you care not to touch, and therefore we will allow the friends to take their meal in peace. Neither will we join their after revel when two or three old cronies came in and made a night of it, until George and Chauncey sought their beds fairly tired out with jollity.

When breakfast was over the next morning, and Chauncey found that George had excused himself from attendance at the timber-yard, he said:

'I am glad you can give the morning to me, as I have some news for you that may, perhaps, surprise and annoy you.'

'Indeed!' replied George. 'What is it?'

'I would not touch upon it last night, although, I think, some immediate action should be taken by you or your friends,' continued Chauncey, looking very serious.

'Pray speak out,' said George.

'Oh yes. I must do that, for I have no tact, never had, to make an unpleasant matter agreeable. Have you heard from your uncle lately?'

'Yes, two days ago—principally on Mr. Baw's business,' replied George.

'My old boy, your uncle never intended you any good when he shut you up in that log house of Baw's. He put you there for his own selfish purpose and nothing else.'

'Why do you say that?' asked George.

'He has led you to suppose that you were to be his heir some day, has he not?'

'He has never said *that* in direct terms; but he certainly has hinted at such a possibility.'

'Then he's an old scamp, if he don't deserve a harder name,' said Chauncey, thumping the table. 'Two days ago he did his best to disinherit you. You may stare, but I saw with my own eyes, heard with my own ears, that old ragamuffin marry a bouncing woman of thirty.'

'Marry! Uncle Silas marry?'

'Fast as St. Mary Axe could do it, to a snuffeller's daughter; and then Chauncey, to the astonishment of his friend, narrated what we already know of the wedding at which Mr. Chauncey had so officiously assisted.

'This is indeed a terrible blow,' said George, 'an unexpected blow.'

'Yes; I am afraid, knowing the hands he has fallen into, that he won't have a will of his own when a few months have passed,' said Chauncey. 'I

found out how the matter came about. Old Silas was very ill, and wouldn't have a doctor; but—a Beadle, I call him, got at him, and then introduced his daughter as nurse. They first physicked him nearly to death, and then brought him round with bottled porter. They told the old fool they had saved his life, and he believed it; and out of gratitude, and the want of a nurse, he proposed to Miss High-dried, and married her.'

'This hits me harder than you know, Chauncey—much harder. Poor Letty and I can never hope now—'

'Oh, nonsense!' replied Chauncey. 'Keep your uncle's secret, as he will if he can, marry Letty, and let Mother Green storm afterwards.'

George shook his head, and then said—

'Chauncey, you advise that which is dishonourable.'

'All fair in love, old boy,' replied Chauncey, with a laugh; 'and if I were you, to gain the woman who loves me, and whom I love, I'd KILL MY UNCLE.'

'Great heaven! what do you say? But I see—you were joking. No; my course is perfectly clear so far as Mrs. Green and Letty are concerned. I go to them at once, and tell what has taken place. If I am forbidden to continue my visits by Mrs. Green she shall be obeyed. Letty, I know, will be always true to me; and when I can make a home for her, I can claim her with honour.'

'Devilish pretty speech,' said Chauncey, 'and all right, I have no doubt. I still say, kill old Silas Cheeseman, and get married: or, stay—perhaps—yes—you shall write to him, now that he's honeymoon-struck—tell him you want to follow his example, and require ten thousand pounds to do it.'

'I understand this nonsense, Chauncey,' replied George, with a sad smile. 'Your friendly chaff is well meant; but my case is very serious. And so good-bye for an hour or two. You will find me here after that time.'

The road to Mrs. Green's cottage never seemed so long before to George Poynter as it did now that he felt his fate. The happiness, for a time at least, of his darling Letty depended upon the interview he was seeking with her mother. He was not without some justification for the misgivings which beset him, as Mrs. Green had more than twice or thrice casually hinted at what a mother's course should be, to prevent a child 'marrying into poverty.' Indeed, she had once told him, when Letty was not present, how glad she was when his

uncle's recognition of him produced such a favourable turn in George's fortunes, as it had spared them all the pain which she should have felt it her duty to have inflicted. The crisis had only been deferred. There were tears from Mrs. Green—regrets and pity; but there were also cold, cruel words, which were not to be gainsaid, unless Letty could disobey the mother who had loved her all her life, and lived only to see her happy.

George spared his Letty and her mother any contest as to the decision to be made. He promised to obey Mrs. Green in all she required of him; but he promised Letty also, when they were left alone, that his love never should change, nor should a doubt ever have place in his thoughts that she could change one tittle in her love for him. And as he held her to his beating heart—not for the last time, no! no!—he told her how he would strive to make a home for both—that their probation would be short if a brave resolution could only find the means to work with. And they would come—they always did; for had they not been promised by the One which could not lie?

Poor hearts! they parted very sadly; but a good angel was already busying himself for their reunion. And such an angel!—Chauncey Gibbs!

'He won't write to old Silas? Then I will,' said Chauncey, half aloud, when George had left him. 'He won't kill his uncle—an old fool; then I will.' He opened the long blade of his pen-knife and—trimmed a quill which he found on George's desk.

There were paper and ink, as may be supposed, and there was also the ready-writer Chauncey, who began:—

'St. Gnats, Dec. 26, 18—.'

'DEAR SIR,—As my friend, Mr. George Poynter, is unfortunately suffering at this time from a severe blow in his chest—("That's perfectly true")—I have placed myself at his service; and although I shall not express myself as he would have done on the subject—("That's true again, I fancy")—I hope you will take the will for the deed. News has reached us here, dear sir—("He'll like that dear sir")—that after many years of deliberate calculation—("No, not calculation")—consideration, you have discovered that man was not made to live alone, and therefore, with a wise regard for your own happiness, you have sought connubial felicity at the altar of St. Mary Axe—("Very

good!") muttered Chauncey; "the name of the church will show that his secret is known to us.")—I know not whether it is your wish that your blissful union should be made generally known; but I cannot hesitate (on the part of my friend, I mean) to offer you my sincerest congratulations, and to wish you all the happiness you deserve.—("That's true; and I should like to add, all you are likely to find.")—I am aware that what you have done must necessarily interfere largely, if not entirely, with those expectations which you once or twice—("Shall I say promised? No,"—encouraged me to entertain.—("What would old George say to that?")—and though I descend from the clouds,—hope—"Good figure that!")—to the substratum of daily toil and permanent anxiety, I shall know that you are sitting happy at your domestic hearth, smoking the pipe of peace—"It wants something else to round off the sentence"—and—and—"Oh, blow it!")—rocking the cradle.

'May I request—if not asking too much at this blissful period of your life—a line, to tell me that I may add to my affectionate remembrances an Aunt Chesseman?

'I remain, dear Sir,

'Your affectionate nephew,

'For GEORGE POYNTER.'

Chauncey paused. 'It won't do to sign my name, or Mrs. C. will remember it. Yes—I have it—they never heard the name of

'C. GIBBS.'

Having sealed and directed his letter, Chauncey proceeded to post it.

In travelling down from London Chauncey had learned that a projected branch railway from St. Gnats was in high favour with all the monied interest of the place; and when he suggested the propriety of killing old Silas he had this railway in his mind, as on the following day the allotment of shares was to take place. Chauncey knew—as he knew everybody—Mr. Golding, the banker and chairman *pro tem.* of the projected company. Without the least misgiving or hesitation he called upon that highly respectable gentleman, and, after a few minutes' interview, gave the conversation an extraordinary twist, or jerk, as thus:

'You've heard of the great windfall to our townsman, George Poynter, I suppose,' said Chauncey. 'No? Well, perhaps it was hardly to be expected, seeing what a retiring fellow he is.'

'What is it?' asked Mr. Golding.

He is a young man for whom I have the greatest respect. I shall be glad to hear of any good fortune to him.

'And it is a good fortune! His uncle, you know, was immensely rich,' said Chauncey. 'The old bachelor is no more—went off three days ago—and my friend George was long ago his appointed heir.'

'Silas Cheeseman gone!' remarked Mr. Golding, with a shrug: 'a very money-getting man; and must have died very rich—very rich.'

'E-nor-mously rich! Single man many years; no expenses, you know,' said Chauncey. 'I witnessed the last moments of the old bachelor at St. Mary Axe. Went off quite composedly after his will was accomplished. By-the-bye, it strikes me you might secure the interest of young George.'

'How, my dear sir?' asked Mr. Golding: 'we are always glad to secure a good client—'

'And with such wealth!' said Chauncey. 'You allot shares in the St. Gnats Junction to-morrow, do you not?'

'Yes,' replied the banker; 'and the applications exceed anything I ever knew: the shares will be five or six premium before to-morrow is over.'

'That's your plan, then! Secure him a thousand.'

'A thousand!' exclaimed Mr. Golding.

'Well, half a thousand—say five hundred—for George Poynter; I'll let him know whose influence he has to thank for them. You'll be the banker of his immense wealth—his friend—adviser.'

'But he has not applied,' said Mr. Golding.

'But you have. What's a paltry five hundred to you, in comparison to after gain—or to him? He won't care for the money, but the friendliness of the thing,' said Chauncey, with a flourish of the hand, as though he were proposing the merest trifle of a sacrifice.

'And you, my dear sir?' asked Mr. Golding.

'Oh, nothing; I want nothing; and you may rely upon my secrecy.'

Mr. Golding pressed Chauncey's hand, and thanked him for the friendly suggestion.

Mr. Golding had but one confidant, Mr. Baxter, who at that moment entered the bank, and was announced as being there.

'Do you object to my naming the matter to my friend Baxter?—great influence at the Board,' said Golding.

'Not in the least: perhaps he may

help you to make the allotment a thousand,' replied Chauncey.

'Oh, impossible, my good friend,' said the banker. 'Show in Mr. Baxter.'

Chauncey's communication having been repeated to Mr. Baxter, the diplomatist thought he had better retire; but he had not gone many yards from the bank when Mr. Baxter overtook him.

'Delighted to hear what you have told us concerning your friend Poynter—an excellent young man, and deserves all he gets.'

'I am sure of that,' said Chauncey, 'whatever good it may be.'

'He'll reside at St. Gnats, I suppose?'

'Yes,' answered Chauncey.

'And will want a house suitable to his new position?'

'Yes.'

'Now I am wanting to sell Prospect House yonder—fine garden, abundance of water, and all that,—would it suit him, do you think?'

Chauncey was rather posed by this inquiry, and said, therefore, 'Perhaps.'

'I think it would: 3500*l.* is what I ask—and could get it, but I dislike the man. You know Captain Ranger?—of course you must,' said Baxter, with emphasis.

Chauncey did not and would not know Captain Ranger.

'He is a troublesome fellow, and I should be glad if he would leave the place,' said Mr. Baxter. 'If Mr. Poynter will buy he shall have the preference.'

Chauncey saw no objection to that, and promised to speak to his friend if Mr. Baxter would make the offer in writing; but 3000*l.*, he thought, would be the utmost that Mr. Poynter would give for a house.

Mr. Baxter paused for a moment, and, as they were opposite his counting-house, he invited Chauncey in, and subsequently gave him a letter to Mr. George Poynter, containing an unconditional offer of Prospect House for 3000*l.* Chauncey carefully put away the letter, and bade Mr. Baxter good day.

Poor George had returned to his lodging when Chauncey had transacted all the important business we have recorded, and not all his friend's good spirits could rouse him from almost despondency.

'My old boy,' said Chauncey, 'you'll sink down, down, if you show the white feather in this way. You're young enough to work and like it—I never did.'

'It is not hard work—hard fighting

with the world, that I am fearing; it is the effect of this day's cruel trial upon poor Letty.'

And then George told Chauncey all that had passed.

'Well, you would be so hastily honourable,' replied Chauncey; 'you had better been advised by me—waited a day or two until you had killed your uncle.'

George looked at his friend, and saw a cunning twinkle in his eye; but Chauncey had his own reasons for saying no more on the subject.

George was very ill the next morning—too ill to go to the timber-yard; so Chauncey offered to see Mr. Bawk, and, if business pressed, to supply George's place for a day or two. Mr. Bawk declined Mr. Chauncey's services, and was so excessively polite and anxious in his inquiries about Mr. George, that Chauncey thought the story of yesterday had reached Mr. Bawk.

It was not so; but Captain Ranger had been to the timber-yard to see Mr. Poynter, and had surprised Mr. Bawk by assuring him that his clerk must have come into money, as he had bought Prospect House, at a sum which he (Captain Ranger) had refused to give. He had, however, left a commission with Mr. Bawk; and Chauncey wormed out of the timber-merchant the following particulars.

Captain Ranger, it appeared, had married a lady with money—not always a desirable exchange for a man's life and liberty—and the lady never allowed him to forget the pecuniary part of their engagement. She had taken a fancy—the word is not strong enough—a longing for Prospect House, and the Captain had undertaken to obtain it; but, being fond of a bargain, he had disgusted Mr. Baxter with a tiresome negotiation, and the house had slipped from him. To confess this to Mrs. Captain Ranger would be to invoke a conjugal tempest; and in his extremity he had come to Mr. Bawk to intercede with his clerk to transfer his purchase.

'Well,' said Chauncey, 'George is a good-natured fellow—too good-natured—and I will undertake to say that the Captain shall have Prospect House for 4000*l*.'

'Four thousand pounds!' exclaimed Mr. Bawk.

'And not one shilling less,' said Chauncey, firmly. 'The house is worth it as it stands; but compute its value to Captain Ranger and it is cheap at any money.'

Mr. Bawk pleaded to a stone agent when he tried to soften Mr. Chauncey; and Captain Ranger coming into the counting-house at the moment, heard the terms proposed, raved like a maniac for ten minutes, and then consented to be swindled—robbed, for the sake of peace and quietness.

Chauncey could be a man of business when he pleased; and he was now in a business mood. He therefore trotted off the angry Captain to an attorney's, made the transfer, and secured a prospective 1000*l*. for his friend George by KILLING HIS UNCLE.

As the day wore on, Chauncey waited upon Mr. Golding, and found that gentleman writing to Mr. Poynter, and expressing the great pleasure it gave him to hand him a letter of allotment for 500 shares in the St. Gnats Junction, &c. &c. &c. Railway; adding a hope that the firm of Golding, Silveston, & Co. might have Mr. Poynter's name on their books as an honoured client.

Chauncey undertook to deliver the letter, and to use his influence with his friend to make the only acknowledgment he could for such disinterested generosity.

Poor George was very ill at ease when his friend Chauncey returned, and at first was disposed to be angry at what he felt to be his inconsiderate rallery.

'I am serious, old boy, quite serious,' said Chauncey, throwing Golding's letter and the transfer on the table; 'I have killed old Silas Cheeseman, and there are some of the proceeds of the transaction. Open—read and satisfy yourself.'

George opened the envelope containing the transfer, and then Mr. Golding's letter. He was in a mist. He thought he was delirious and had lost his reason; and Chauncey was a long time making him comprehend how he had come to be possessed of—

Profit on transfer . . .	£1000
Profit on 500 Shares; premium 5 per Share . . .	2500
Total . . .	£3500

and all by killing old Silas Cheeseman!

Poor George was hard to satisfy that these large gains were honourably come by; and when he went to sleep he dreamt that he had robbed the bank and had set Prospect House on fire. The following morning brought a letter from uncle Silas.

The poor old dotard expressed himself so pleased at his nephew's forgiveness of an act which he had thought would have provoked only revilings and wicked wishes, that he enclosed a cheque for 1000*l.*, and his avuncular blessing.

Was ever another fortune made by such means? George had all the money; Mr. Golding begging his retention of the shares, as his commercial acuteness might be damaged by a disclosure of the trick which had been practised upon his cupidity; and Cap-

tain Ranger was submissively satisfied, having told his *care spouse* that he had bought Prospect House a decided bargain.

Mrs. Green would have had to endure many mortifying reflections had it not been Christmas time, when Letty and George, and all other estranged friends, are willing to forget their old grievances, and, in thankfulness that such a season was vouchsafed to erring man, humbly imitate the Great Forgiver.

MARK LEMON.

SNOWED UP WITH A BURGLAR.

'BANKS! Banks! Where has the fellow gone to?' cried Smith Butler's thin, peevish voice from the depths of his luxurious arm-chair, placed in the farthest angle of a broad-leaved Indian screen. 'I did not see him go down the garden. Where has he put himself, eh?'

'I'm sure I don't know, sir,' answered the footman, looking out of the study window with a great show of earnestness. 'I turned him away, and didn't take no more particular notice of him.'

'Then why did you not take particular notice of him, Banks?' said his master, snappishly. 'You ought to have taken particular notice of him. What do I have you for but to take particular notice of things? A pretty thing, indeed, that you think you may do just as you like, and take notice or not as it suits you. I shall soon have to pay another servant to do your work, and take notice for you, if this kind of carelessness is to go on.' Here Banks gave an almost imperceptible smile. 'I beg you will go round and see if that man has gone. I do not like ill-looking tramps prowling about the premises, especially just at the time when Carlo has been found dead so mysteriously. Go, I tell you—don't you hear?—and see at once.'

'Yes, sir,' replied Banks, respectfully enough as to outside manner—never mind his thoughts and voiceless words; and he left the room, calmly indifferent to the shrill cries calling him back to give him a thousand minute instructions, as to what he was to do and where he was to go, until obliged to return by the violent ringing of the bell, when he was rated for ten minutes without a pause. And then it was of no use to look after the ill-looking tramp who had disturbed Smith Butler's nerves.

The worst-tempered, most selfish, peevish, irritable man in the world was this same Smith Butler, of Gullystone. Humoured and spoiled as an only child, suffered to tyrannize and domineer as a husband—his wife having been a meek-spirited, much afflicted woman, who would have yielded to a mouse or a gorilla, as the case might have been, if once invested with the name of master—always absolute, always selfish, he was one of those men who recognize no rights save their own, and who make of their own wishes and desires the sole laws regulating their lives. He was a tall, thin, sallow-cheeked man, with lank grey hair, a high nose, and sunken eyes, mere lines for lips, and a small chin, but a broad jaw, taken from ear to ear. He was in poor health, being of the miserable race of the dyspeptic, which tended to render him more irritable; and his fortune had been suddenly doubled by a lucky investment, which tended to render him more arbitrary. Perhaps there could not have been found anywhere a more unpleasant companion or a more tyrannical master than Smith Butler, of Gullystone, or one less respected and less beloved. His poor afflicted wife had been dead for some years now, and had fortunately left no children to bear the weight of his ill-temper in her stead; but he had an orphan niece, Carry Whiston, his wife's brother's child, who lived with him, and was the sole relation or legal connexion he had. She was dependent on him, too, which made the bond between them the stricter, if not the pleasanter; for, having no money of her own (her father had died insolvent), and Smith Butler designing to make her his heiress if she pleased him, he claimed to have absolute right over her—soul, mind, and life

to be subject to him without reserve. Carry thought differently, and struggled gallantly against her commandant; but Smith Butler held the reins, riding with a martingale, which rendered kicking difficult, and the girl's independent spirit went for little in the contest for ever going on between them.

One other person shared in Carry's instinct of revolt: this was Walter Lechmere, the son of Carry's father's nearest friend, and now continuing the family tradition by being the nearest friend of Carry herself. But, unfortunately for the girl, Walter was especially obnoxious to Smith Butler, partly on account of a bad habit he had of speaking his mind, and being difficult to put down by the mere force of assertion; and partly because, having but small means and moderate prospects, he had dared to raise his eyes to Carry, with aspirations more presumptuous than fraternal. And her uncle would not have overlooked this kind of thing even in a lord, without permission first demanded of himself; so that, in a mere nobody like Walter Lechmere, unauthorized love-making was a sin past forgiveness. Wherefore the handsome, dashing, good-tempered young engineer met with but scant welcome at Gullystone, save from Carry. But what he met with from her, on the rare occasions when he ventured to appear, made up for all the rest.

It was in the winter time when this vision of a 'dour,' ill-looking tramp prowling about the house shook Mr. Butler's nerves, never case-proof against such assaults. Indeed, it was Christmas Eve; and Carry knew, if her uncle did not, that Walter Lechmere would surely have pressing business in the neighbourhood of Gullystone before the day was out, even though it was now snowing fast, with the prospect of worse weather to come in the leaden sky, which seemed almost to touch the tops of the naked trees as they shivered in the rising wind, and trembled under the weight of the driving snow. And soon, indeed, she saw him from her bedroom window, where she had been watching all the day, come riding along the road, not with the hard and heavy pace usual to him, but slowly and cautiously, his mare tottering and limping, hardly able to do her work. She had fallen with him, and had hurt herself so badly, that it had been a matter of anxious calculation with him whether he could reach Gullystone at all to-day; and what he could do for her, poor beast, if he did not shoot her on the spot. However, doubts were at an end

now; for here he was in sight of the gates, and that bright mass of violet in the centre window waving a small white flag, which he knew to be Carry waving her handkerchief; and soon both man and mare stood before the hall-door, and the haven of love and rest was won.

'Who's that?—who's that?' cried Smith Butler, querulously, when he heard the peal of the door-bell and the clatter and clang that followed.

'Mr. Walter Lechmere, sir,' replied the ubiquitous and ever-civil Banks, making no sign of consciousness that he was handing his master a bitter pill for his Christmas digestion.

Mr. Smith Butler swore—he often swore—that being about the most energetic exercise in which he indulged, and muttering, 'I'll soon send the young dog packing!' went straight into the drawing-room, where he found Walter and Carry Whiston standing in demure propriety on the hearthrug—young ears being sharp, and he having a resonant cough, always worse when he was annoyed.

'So, Mr. Lechmere,' he said, as he entered, 'to what may I owe the honour of this visit, eh?'

'Well, sir, I was in the neighbourhood, and I could not resist the temptation of riding over to see my old friends,' answered Walter, cheerily.

'All very well, sir, for you,' returned Mr. Butler, with a certain feminine spitefulness of emphasis; 'but perhaps it would have been more becoming if you had reflected whether the temptation was ours or not.'

'At Christmas time every one is welcome,' said Walter.

'Oh, indeed, sir!—that is your opinion, is it? I beg leave to differ from you, Mr. Lechmere: not even at Christmas time is every one welcome at Gullystone.'

'I am very sorry, sir,' said Walter, turning rather red, while Carry flushed an indignant scarlet, 'but I fear I must trespass a little on your hospitality, for my mare has fallen with me to-day, and is so badly hurt I cannot ride her back to the station. I am ashamed to say it,' he added, tossing off his bright brown hair and smiling frankly, 'but I fear it must be that you either lend me a horse, or he glanced at the blinding snow, or give me shelter till I can use my own.'

'Lend you a horse, sir!' quivered Smith Butler, angrily—'send one of my valuable horses out with you on such a day as this! Are you mad, Mr. Lechmere? You have just thrown down

your own screw, and, from what you say, have very likely spoiled her for life, and you have the audacity to ask me for one of my thoroughbreds! Do you know what my stable costs me, Mr. Lechmere?—do you know what my horses are worth at Tattersall's? Had you not better ask me for my servants, and my carriage, and my plate, and my banker's book, and all that I have at once? Am I a stable-keeper, that I should supply every young gentleman who chooses to ask me for a riding-horse at his pleasure? Here he stopped, out of breath, and coughing loudly.

'Then I am afraid Mr. Lechmere must stay here, uncle,' said Carry, with a fine show of not particularly caring which way it went. 'It is twelve miles to the station; his own horse cannot go, and you will not lend him one of yours—of course; so what can be done? It is such a tremendous day, too; he would very likely be lost in the snow if even he attempted the walk; and it would not be very pleasant to have that maid of us.' She turned a little pale as she uttered these last words.

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Mr. Butler, tartly. 'Lost in the snow, forsooth! is he a baby, or are we living on the Alps?' and he went to the window to look out. But even he could not deny the terribleness of the day. It was not merely a heavy fall of snow, but a storm and tempest of snow, with a wind that howled like a hungry wolf, and sharp flying showers of ice that cut, and bruised, and stung, as if they had been flying fragments of iron. It was a day on which, for the sake of his private pride and public repute, even the owner of Gullystone could not refuse shelter to a decently-dressed enemy; though, had it been a shade less severe, he would have turned him out to fight his way through it as he best could, without a moment's hesitation or remorse.

'It may clear up,' he then said, sulkily. 'It is rather bad now.'

'And if it does not, you must make up your mind to stay here quietly, Mr. Lechmere,' chimed in Carry, rather quickly, as she bent her head over her embroidery.

'Thank you, Miss Whiston,' was Mr. Walter's reply to this. 'I am sorry to trouble you, but I confess I do not see how it can be very well helped.' Then, without drawing breath, he plunged off into a long account of a Spanish railroad for which he was negotiating (to be the chief engineer thereof, that means), till Smith Butler grew so irritable at

the sound of his voice—that cheery, mellow voice, which a friend of his always said reminded him of pine-apples—he could really bear it no longer; so, with an audible expletive of a peevish rather than an excessive kind, he turned his back on the pair, and left the room in a pet. It was always a trial to him when fate and circumstance overmastered his will; and in the sacred depths of his own sanctum he growled and fretted himself into a small fever, while the young people, unmolested, went straightway up to heaven in the drawing-room.

A bright-faced, bright-eyed, red-lipped, and most sweet-tempered girl was Carry Whiston; pretty, too, in her brown-haired, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed style,—a little too round, perhaps, for perfect artistry, but not heavy enough for clumsiness, if less than graceful; a sweet, soft, caressing, and caressable thing, such as I have heard called 'a lovely woman' by those few who understand classification and nomenclature; thoroughly healthy both in mind and body, clean, pure, and fresh; but with all the softness of her form, and the sweetness of her temper, by no means weak or nerveless, having plenty of will underneath her geniality,—velvet paws, not covering claws that would scratch, and wound, and rend, but covering small bars of iron that held their own undauntedly, and would not be beaten off or unclasped by any means save their own free will. Engaged now to Walter without her uncle's knowledge—naughty puss! and distinctly against his wishes—which, perhaps, was naughtier still; only that her own dear papa would have liked it; which reflection a little soothed her conscience when this became important on the subject of submission; her lover knew full well that no intimidation, no persuasion, no cajolery, would make her unfaithful, or cause her to swerve a hair's-breadth from her promise.

'I do not know what would become of me, Carry, if I could not trust you!' said Walter, a little sadly, while they were sitting together after Mr. Butler had left them.

'You know you may trust me, Walter,' answered Carry, fondly. 'Uncle wants me to marry poor George Grey, but I don't think you need fear him as a very formidable rival' and she laughed.

'Well, I don't think I need,' said Walter. 'Let me see, how tall is he, Carry? up to your shoulder?'

'About,' she said, laughing again; 'at all events, not up to my heart, Mr. Walter.'

Which was such a pretty conceit, if not quite original, that Walter helped himself to a double allowance of a certain form of small change current between them, to which he was not wholly unaccustomed nor she obnoxious.

'He was to have come here to-day,' Carry then went on to say, when that little interlude was concluded. 'Uncle asked him to come over and spend Christmas with us; but it is such a terrible day—and fortunately for us, he is such a poor creature—that I don't think he will come.'

'But he would come in a close carriage, would he not?'

'Oh yes, of course,' Carry said. 'I do not think he can ride; I am sure, indeed, he cannot. I know he cannot drive, and I know he cannot row, so I do not suppose he can ride. Fancy such a miserable creature!'

'He may come then,' returned Walter, gloomily. 'Is he afraid of his horses?'

'He is afraid of everything,' she said, with a pretty little disdainful air; 'but not afraid in that way. He might be afraid of the day for himself, but that would be all. Oh!' she exclaimed, with a deep flush and an accent of extreme vexation; 'we need not discuss the matter further, Walter dear, for here he is.'

And as she spoke, George Grey's handsome, well-appointed carriage drove slowly up to the door.

Not a bad fellow was this same George Grey, of Grey's Court; simply contemptible, judged by the woman's instinctive standard of what is admirable and fitting in a man. Small, weak, effeminate—what would have been weak and effeminate in a girl, so what must he have been as a man!—without the physical strength or robust moral qualities of his sex, and cowardly, nervous, conscientious, and good-natured, irresolute, and utterly unable to 'stand up' for himself, no matter what the provocation; by no means good-looking, so that he had not even the small prettiness sometimes seen in unmanly and insignificant men, to compensate never so meagrely for his want of power—he had absolutely nothing to recommend him to a woman's favour save his fortune, and the certainty of being mistress could she consent to be his wife. As for love, that was impossible with most, certainly quite impossible with such a girl as Carry Whiston, too healthy and natural her-

self to be very tolerant of anything at all abnormal in others. And, indeed, the feeling with which George Grey inspired her was a physical shrinking—a loathing of the flesh—such as some people have for frogs, or mice, or earwigs, or blackbeetles, or anything else of which they are not exactly afraid, as we use the word, but to which they have an invincible repugnance and instinctive disgust. But for all that, George Grey persevered in his visits and his suit. He was desperately in love with Carry, poor fellow; and in spite of his constitutional timidity, breast her displeasure, defended as he was by theegis of so powerful a protector as Smith Butler, who had promised him her hand by next spring. They did not count upon the slender iron bars within the velvet, or take into the general reckoning Walter Lechmere's power of attraction, and the small change in current circulation between him and Carry, whenever, by rare good chance, they met, and were alone.

This was the first time the two aspirants had stood face to face; and surely even Smith Butler could not, in his heart, blame the choice which Carry had made. George Grey, not quite five feet four—wanting a quarter of an inch to that height—with a weakly-knit frame, where the narrow shoulders sloped violently from the slender neck, and where the hips were a trifle the wider of the two, where the knees turned inward, and the hands and feet were like the dry, bony paws of some small beast, had but little chance in a comparison with Walter Lechmere, six feet without his boots, strong, clean-limbed, and muscular—a first-rate fencer, a first-rate boxer, a capital shot, a good oarsman, a daring horseman—well up, indeed, in every manly exercise, and holding high rank in every manly sport; while as for beauty, how could that mottled, unwholesome face, with the sandy hair and the greenish eyes, ever weak and wavering, the sandy down on the lips and chin, looking more like a smear than even an incipient beard, be spoken of in the same day with the thick, curly, bright, brown hair, the broad white brow, the bronzed cheek, the frank blue eyes, quiet and steady, and that full beard, soft and glossy, as belonged to the first flush of his young manhood, but which was of that luxuriant and well-shaped kind that is as fascinating to womanly eyes as the trim ankle and gimp waist is to manly ones. Had George Grey, uncomely as

he was, been a very angel in nature, and had Walter Lechmere been a good-looking fiend, I sadly fear most women would have compounded with the fiendship for the sake of the beauty; but when, if their virtues were equal in the sum, Walter's were at least the manlier of the two, Carry had not a single inducement to forsake her own love and take up with her uncle's, save, indeed, that one sole lure of money, which was no lure to her.

Very uneasy, and abashed, and troubled was poor George Grey when he heard the name of that formidable-looking guest who had preceded him, and whom he found so comfortably established in the drawing-room, holding silks, while Carry wound them off his hands, as if he had been her brother—or more. But Smith Butler told him fretfully 'not to mind,' how could he expect to succeed if he was always so—expletively—afraid? Must not every man run the risk of rivals? What did he want more? What the deuce could he want more? Had he not him, Smith Butler, at his back; did he want a regiment of uncles to make sure of a silly girl, bound to obey his will? So he argued from the dark angle of the Indian screen, and George Grey, who was quite as much afraid of his champion as he was grateful to him, was fain to hold his peace, poor little man, and to pretend the serenity he did not feel.

So the afternoon wore away, the storm ever deepening, and the wind howling with increased fury as the evening came on; till, while they were at dinner, it seemed as if there must be some terrible catastrophe, so wild and fierce and uncontrolled as it was. It made both Smith Butler and George Grey turn quite pale and nervous, it blew so fiercely, with such an unstrained kind of expression in the howling blasts that tore about the chimney, and shrieked against the panes; but Carry and Walter only laughed, as at their best friend; and, who knows? it might continue even over to-morrow, and Walter be bound in his pleasant prison for another twenty-four hours.

'A foolish trick that of yours, Mr. Lechmere!' said Mr. Butler, suddenly, and with much ill-temper: he had been thinking the same thing as Carry and Walter, and chafing at the prospect of his enforced hospitality, and this most untoward rivalry. 'I have always heard you boast of your horsemanship; not very like a good hand to throw your mare and injure her, as it seems you have

done, most seriously; seriously, Day said, did he not, Banks?'

'Yea, sir,' said Banks, in his Rhadamanthine official voice.

'I was riding down hill and she stepped on a loose stone,' returned Walter. 'The ground was as hard as iron, you know, sir, and as slippery as glass.'

'And of course you were riding at a breakneck pace!' sneered the host.

'Well, I confess I was going a little too hard for prudence,' answered Walter, throwing his hair from off his forehead. Carry had once told him that she liked that action of his, and, with the unconscious vanity of the beloved, he was constantly repeating it now.

'I have always understood that it is very dangerous to ride fast down hill,' said George Grey hesitatingly. He was a conscientious little man, and did not like to speak as if he understood things of which he was profoundly ignorant.

'It is not over safe,' answered Walter carelessly.

'Then why did you do it?' Carry exclaimed impulsively, pausing in the very act of cutting the damson tart.

'I was in a hurry, Miss Whiston,' was the answer; and Carry blushed up to the roots of her hair, meeting the bright blue eyes levelled at her meaningly.

'Did you meet a tramp not far from here?' then asked Smith Butler, who had not seen this little bit of bye-play.

'No, sir, I did not,' Walter answered. 'I met only three men on my way from the station; only three in all the twelve miles; and they were by no means a pleasant-looking triad, I should say. But they were not in my way so I did not trouble myself much about them.'

'Three tramps did you say? Bless my soul! that makes four in one day! and Carlo is just dead,' cried Mr. Butler, uneasily.

'Carlo, dead? Poor old fellow! I did not know that. When did he die? and what did he die of?' asked Walter.

'Why, Caroline, did you not tell Mr. Lechmere that Carlo was dead?' exclaimed Mr. Butler, peevishly. 'Bless my soul, what were you thinking of, to be so remiss as not to tell him that remarkable fact? Banks! why did you not tell Mr. Lechmere that Carlo was dead? did anyone ever hear of such negligence?'

'He was found dead in his kennel this morning,' said Carry. 'He was quite well yesterday, and I heard him bark very much in the night, and this morning he was dead!'

'Dear me, how very extraordinary!' simpered George Grey.

'Most extraordinary!' said Mr. Butler, with emphasis. 'I believe he was poisoned, you know; and to-day comes a tramp about the place who must have vanished into snow I think, for no one saw him go down the garden, and you did not meet him, you say, Mr. Lechmere; so where the deuce the fellow got to I cannot for the life of me imagine.'

'Oh! he has hidden himself in the hayloft for shelter,' laughed Walter, not particularly interested in the subject.

'Oh, has he?' said Mr. Butler grimly. 'Banks, tell Day to search the hayloft this moment, and come and tell me if any one is hidden there or not. Better for him not to be; that is all I can say!'

'Yes, sir,' said Banks, and went into the kitchen, where he and Day (Day was the coachman) had a good laugh at 'master's fads,' over an extra pint beyond their allowance, and then he returned to the dining-room and reported Day as having 'gone to see;' and in due time he reported him as having found the loft perfectly tenantless. He had never stirred from the kitchen fire; but that was of no consequence; Mr. Smith Butler was content; and looking across the table to Walter said sincerely: 'One of your follies as usual, Mr. Lechmere, you see!'

'Not very unlikely though, sir, was it?' said Walter, laughing.

'Very unlikely indeed, I should say,' snapped Mr. Butler. 'I really gave way to the absurdity to satisfy you; I never thought it likely myself.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Walter, quite tranquilly; and Carry put in: 'It is always better to sift things if possible,' without laughing.

On the whole, then, this Christmas Eve dinner was rather a troubled and uncomfortable matter. Mr. Butler paid George Grey marked attention, and openly slighted Walter; while Carry would not speak much to the one and dared not to the other; making up, though in kind looks for what she was obliged to forego in words. And so they were still in that blissful state of early love, when the very presence of the beloved is happiness enough: even under the jealous jealousy of a hundred eyes, they were happy enough; and for the other, Mr. Butler was too arbitrary to fear, and George Grey too timid to demand.

The evening went better. Carry played and sang, while her uncle dozed and George Grey stared at the fire; but Walter Lechmere turned the pages for

her, and put in a bass when her voice needed the support. And the warmth and music and brilliant lighting of the room, that subtle glow of Christmas time, which all the innocent and happy feel, made them forget the storm raging out of doors—or, if reminded of it, they blessed it as shipwrecked seamen bless the wind that blows them into port; while making them also so lovingly confident of the future, and so sure that their happiness would some day be perfected.

At last it all came to an end and the party separated; Walter and Carry more in love than ever, and more resolute and happier, and George Grey deeply and profoundly wretched. And as they separated, Smith Butler said fretfully, 'That fellow has quite shaken my nerves to-day! I shall dream of him, I know, and very likely have the nightmare. An ill-looking dog! I wonder what the dickens became of him!'

'Well, uncle, did you dream of the tramp?' said Carry the next morning.

'Yes, I did,' he answered sourly; 'and what is more I could have taken my oath I heard stealthy footsteps walking about the passage, and the dining-room door unlock and open.'

'Oh, uncle?' laughed the girl, 'what a fancy!'

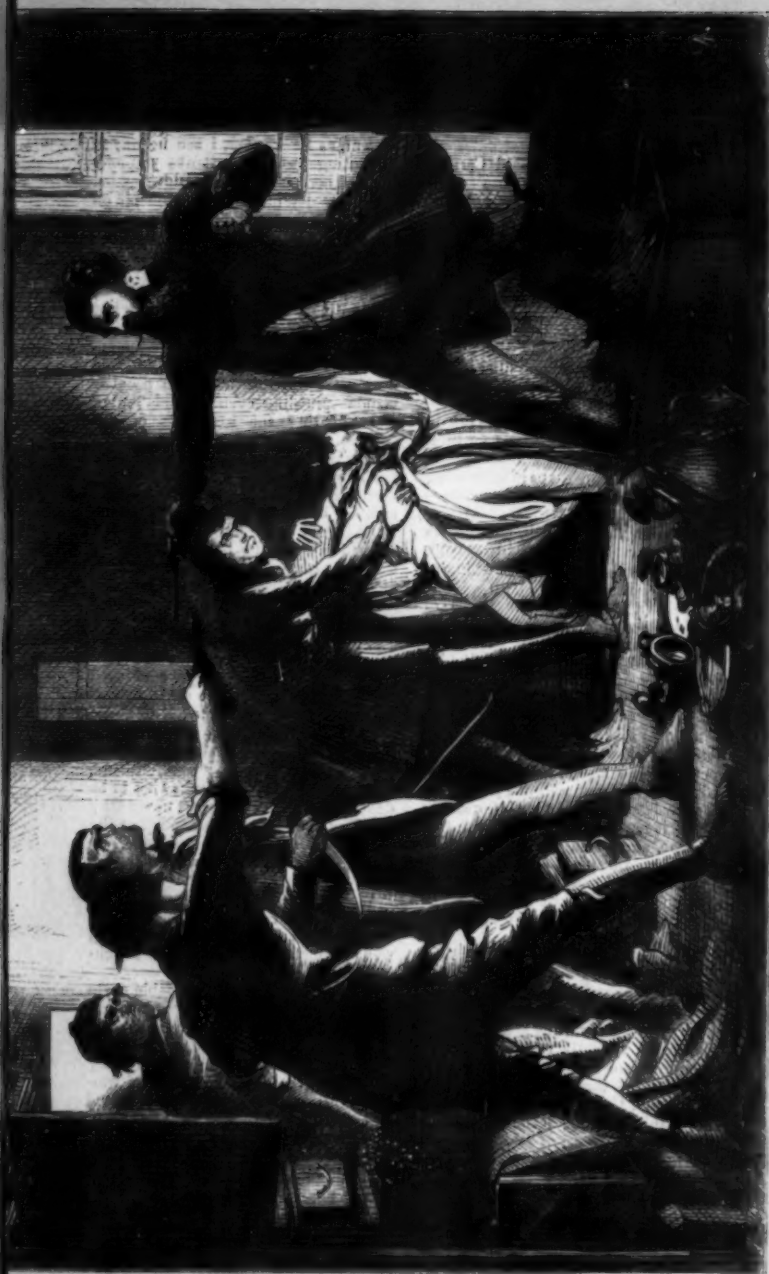
'I suppose it was a fancy, Caroline,' said Smith Butler grimly. 'But it was not one to laugh at, for all that. Shall I ever teach you softness or respect of manner?—shall I ever make a lady of you?'

Carry coloured. It was not very pleasant to be snubbed, she thought, before Walter and George Grey; but the pretty little pont of but half a moment passed off like a flying shadow from a flowerbed; and, going round to where her uncle sat warming his feet and spreading out his hands to the blaze, she laid her fresh round cheek on his sorrowful forehead and said caressingly, 'I did not mean to be disrespectful, uncle.'

'Which does not alter the fact though it may modify its meaning, Caroline,' returned that gentleman sententially.

Then Banks coming in with the urn, they placed themselves at table, and the breakfast began; both Walter and George Grey internally convulsed with love, each in his own way, and longing to have been that grim and coffee-coloured uncle, if only for the bliss of that one sweet carous.

Suddenly Mr. Butler spoke: 'Caroline!' he said, hastily and angrily.



SNOWED UP WITH A BURGLAR.—P. 21

Drawn by S. A. F. 1874.

'Yes, uncle dear?' and the bright face turned like a sunbeam to him.

'How often have I said I would not have the food sent up to our table touched in the kitchen?'

'Well, it is not, uncle,' said Carry a little anxiously; 'what has been touched?'

'My pigeon pie,' said her uncle, furiously, and he struck the handle of his knife upon the table. 'Look, here—what do you call this, eh? Is this not being touched? What do you mean by this, Caroline?' He dragged the dish forward.

Carry saw to her dismay the pigeon pie, which was her uncle's peculiar breakfast dish—touched by no one but himself—more than half devoured.

'Ring the bell at once,' he cried; 'and have up Banks to answer for himself. I will have no foolish stories told me of cats or mice, perhaps blackbeetles, but I'll know the truth of this at once—at once!'

So Walter rang the bell, and Banks came to the summons, as he always did, as quickly as if he had been listening at the door.

'Banks! what is the meaning of this?' exclaimed Mr. Butler, pointing to the dishonoured pie.

'It's gone now!' thought Banks. 'Well, sir, I can't exactly tell you,' he replied calmly. 'This morning when I came down stairs the cellaret door was open, and I see a lot of port wine and brandy had been took; and when cook went into the larder, there was plates and a knife and fork, and this pigeon pie all pulled about ten times worse nor you see it now, and one leg of the turkey gone, and bread and other things eat beside. But who did it, sir, I know no more nor the dead, nor does none of us down stairs; for we've all been a-talking of it over, and can't make nothing of it no ways.'

Smith Butler turned pale and pushed back his chair. 'Do you mean to tell me that we have robbers concealed in the house?' he said. 'Snowed up with a legion of burglars waiting to murder us?' He became violently agitated and his cough grew convulsive.

'I don't say that, sir,' replied Banks respectfully, 'but I do say as how it's a curious thing, and no accounting for it, as I can see.'

'Are any of us sleep-walkers?' said Walter.

'Bless my soul, Mr. Lechmere, what rubbish you do talk to be sure!' Smith Butler cried. 'Sleep-walkers!—sleep-walkers do not walk into pigeon pies

and turkeys' legs! Such foolish observations do no good, sir! They only distract one's mind from the main facts, and are worse than useless. For the present, as Banks says, I see no way of accounting for it. So Banks you may go; and here, take this mess down stairs, and never let me see a pigeon pie on my table again as long as I live; do you hear?'

Banks and his master were right; there was no accounting for such an extraordinary phenomenon; so the fact remained as before, unexplained and inscrutable—the fact of a midnight appetite among them, which had satisfied itself on Smith Butler's own peculiar viands—prowling even into his larder, and violating the sanctuaries of his cellaret. So the thing remained; but Walter brought a little serenity to the host, by offering to search the house thoroughly after breakfast, and make sure no one was concealed within its walls. And then Mr. Butler felt glad that to-day was as bad, if not worse than yesterday, and said, quite cordially for him:

'We shall be obliged to keep you prisoner over our poor Christmas-day, I see, Mr. Lechmere; it is impossible for you to face such weather as it is.'

He thought that, if they were locked up with a burglar, it was quite as well to have Walter Lechmere's strong arm and well-known courage to help them through; George Grey being a 'muff,' and he himself but a 'poor creature, owing to his health;' Banks 'not to be depended on—men-servants never are;' and Day living out of the house, at the end of the garden, with his wife, the family laundress, and his brother, the family gardener.

Walter bowed and smiled, and turned rather red, and thanked Carry's uncle warmly; and after breakfast they all went through the ceremony of 'searching the house thoroughly.'

They made quite a formidable party—the three gentlemen and Banks; and they looked everywhere (save in Carry's room, of course), peering into every closet and every recess; George Grey especially great in looking behind window-shutters and chests of drawers, and other places leaving a clear space of about a couple of inches or so; but they found nothing—not a trace, not a line of the midnight consumer of Mr. Butler's pigeon pie. There was a small kind of dust-hole in the farther garret, which they did not enter. The door was locked, and the key had been lost these

twenty years, Smith Butler said: so they passed that by as labour lost indeed, to stir up the dust of twenty years, though Walter would have got the door open by some means or other, had he been allowed to do so; but Mr. Butler, who had become tired by this time, was peevish and cross; and so they all streamed down-stairs again—Walter laughing at the whole affair, and even George Grey putting in his perky little word of scoffing courage, so fearfully like a bantam's crow.

What a strange day it was, this Christmas-day! Here they were, actually 'mowed up,' and unable to get a dozen yards from the house. Day, the coachman, had attempted to get down the road, but had been obliged to turn back again; the way was utterly impracticable. Gullystones was one of those unfortunately-situated places always 'in' for everything bad that came in the way of weather. Floods, snow, frost, winds, spent most of their fury on this lone bleak house; so that when Day reported them prisoners by drifts, no one was surprised. Drifts higher than a man on horseback, and of that thin, powdery snow which will not bear anything heavier than a weasel or a stoat, hemmed them in on all sides; even round the house many of the lower windows were blocked up and darkened with the piled-up heaps. And the drifts were increasing; for it was still snowing as thickly as before, and the wind still blowing from the same quarter, though not so fiercely. There was no help for it; they were all caged and imprisoned as surely as if they had a guard of soldiers or a grating of iron bars to keep them in; and, enemies or lovers, sick or well, sad or joyous, they must make the best of it, and pass the time as pleasantly as they could.

Smith Butler was of neither help nor hindrance as things were. He was in too feeble and irritable a state of nerves and health to bear society for many hours at a time; so he went to his study soon after breakfast, where he made believe to read, but where he did really doze for half the day, and the three young people were left to themselves. If only that horrible nuisance, that George Grey, had been out of the way, thought Carry and Walter, what a time of veritable paradise it would have been!

But George Grey was an institution for the moment, and they must bear with him,—bear with his silly simpers, and his wild dashes at love-making, at which Carry laughed to his face, when

she did not reject them more scornfully; as, when he came up to her once, trembling and dancing and simpering, and looking more like a stage imbecile than anything else, and asked her, point blank, boom! like the firing of a cannon, without ever a match being lighted, 'to give him a lock of her hair as a Christmas present, it would be so nice!'

To which said Miss Carry, disdainfully enough, 'I will give you a lock of Fido's, Mr. Grey; that will be more to the purpose, I think!'

But George simpered again, and said, 'Oh fie, Miss Whiston! to compare yourself with Fido!'

But, as all things come to an end at last, so did this strange Christmas-day; getting itself buried beneath the holly and the mistletoe, the plum-pudding and the punch, and the rest of its national grave-clothes, not to reappear for another three hundred and sixty-five days; when it would spring upon the earth again, fresh, lively, youthful, and jocund as before, making glad hearts and happy homes; healing up old sores, and cementing new ties; and again get joyously buried and put away among the dead sweets of time.

And when they were all in bed and asleep—only poor, irritable, peevish Smith Butler sleeping in short snatches, and waking for long dreary watches,—a thick-set, brutal-looking, begrimed man crept cautiously out of the closet in the garret, which Walter Lechmere would have opened but was prevented, and, with the aid of a dark-lantern, made his way noiselessly down-stairs, and again devoured Smith Butler's viands, and drank his brandy and his wine. And while he ate and drank, in his stealthy wolfish silence and rapacity, he glared round at the valuables in the dining-room, and, handling a pistol concealed in his pocket, said in a hoarse whisper to himself, 'Ah! we shall have a rare swag when the time comes!' Then he crept back to his lair again, and carefully locking the door after him with a skeleton-key that could lock and unlock most things, pulled over him a pile of rugs and a huge wolf-skin 'borrowed' from the hall, and turning round on his side, went to sleep without moring.

On the next morning, the scene of yesterday was in a measure renewed. Again had food been eaten and wine drunk by some one on the premises, getting up in the dead of the night to satisfy his unearthly craving; and still the mystery as to who it was, and why, remained as dense as ever. Even Walter

was puzzled, and Carry a little uneasy; while the servants were as scared as if there was a real live ghost among them, and George Grey was unaffectedly frightened of his own shadow. As for Mr. Butler, this second mystery completed the prostration of his nerves. He sat in his study all the day, his head bent on his breast, his nervous hands drumming restlessly on the table, and his every sense strained like the senses of a man in incipient brain-fever, to catch the faintest sound or sign of anything extraordinary. But the house was as still as the tomb, save for the occasional bursts of music wafted from the drawing-room, or the quickened step of a servant-maid, scurrying through the passages as if pursued by a spectre. The theory of ghosts not eating brought but little comfort to them; and when Banks, in his quality of hero, ridiculed their fear of burglars and the like, reminding them of that thorough search through the house, not a few among them shared George Grey's ideas respecting the space which solid bodies are supposed to occupy, and mentioned places as unexplored and likely, into which nothing thicker than a deal board could have crept.

By the afternoon the weather changed; the wind fell, a steady rain came down, and a quick thaw set in; and by the early evening 'the roads might be presumed to be open,' said Walter, a little maliciously, glancing at Carry, 'and should he relieve Mr. Butler then to-day?'

To which the old man replied angrily that he would not suffer him to leave on any account; he absolutely forbade it; he would not hear another word about it. What! leave them in the state in which they were, with a vampire, a ghoul in the house! a thing shut up with them, they knew not what nor where—but, whether tangible or intangible, a mystery and a horror!—a murderer, perhaps; perhaps a raving maniac; and Walter (he called him Walter in his agitation) to think of leaving! No! he would not allow it; decidedly and distinctly he would not. And Walter did not need the prohibition to be repeated. Then, seeing that Mr. Butler was getting really ill with fear and nervousness, he offered, if it would be any satisfaction to him, to sit up this coming night, and watch for the intruder quietly—in his own mind, unspoken to any one, he suspected poor Banks, and made very sure he should catch him,—which offer Smith Butler accepted unreservedly, adding a half-

surly compliment on his 'pluck' which sounded more like a sneer than a compliment. And so another day passed with the former, in the lovers' almost unalloyed happiness, in George Grey's unalloyed misery, and in Smith Butler's as well, to bear his company.

The night came on. Still the same heavy pelted rain, falling, falling, like the endless pattering of beads; but there was no wind with it; it was a straight incessant downpour; the kind of rain which dulls all sound, both because of the humidity of the air, and the hard, unending patter of the drops. When they had all gone up to their respective rooms, Walter went quietly down-stairs again—taking a loaded revolver with him, to satisfy Smith Butler, though he laughed heartily at the precaution.

For some time he sat by the dying embers of the fire, till the last spark of that too disappeared; and he was in the dead unlighted dark. But all was still not a sound, not a whisper, save the plashing of the remorseless rain and the loud ticking of the clocks. Gullystone was a large, old-fashioned house, truly; and the servants' offices were quite distinct from the dwelling part of the family; and as Walter was watching to catch the thief at the cellaret, he did not watch for burglars, let noiselessly in at the kitchen-door by a barefooted confederate concealed in the house. No one sitting where he was now, in the dining-room, with the door shut, could possibly have heard the slight rustle that was made as the three men passed in, then crept up the kitchen-stairs in their laced shoes, noiselessly, stealthily, one by one.

Suddenly was heard Smith Butler's voice—first one wild piercing shriek, waking the dead echoes of the night with horrible force; then a rough voice as if muttering an oath, and the muffled sound of a man's struggle.

Walter dashed up the stairs, the revolver in his hand; and in less time than it takes to write, stood in Smith Butler's room, face to face with four armed men. Two were ransacking the room—already boxes were broken open, wardrobes, and safes, and drawers all rifled, while many valuables were flung in a heap on the floor; a third held the poor old man by the throat; while the fourth was just slipping across the passage to where Walter's room door stood a little ajar.

What followed was the deadly struggle of men for life. Four against one were heavy odds; but Walter was

brave, with the bravery of blood and training, which always go further than the bad courage of desperate crime. He shot down one man levelling a pistol at his head—it was but the turn of a hair whose shot was first; another he stunned with the life-preserver he wrenched from his own hand; but the remaining two were pressing hard upon him, and one had already wounded him severely with his knife, when Banks appeared, in the scared way of footmen rudely awakened, and snatching up Walter's revolver, which had been knocked out of his hand by one of the men now upon him, fired. It might have been in the air; it might have been at Mr. Butler, or at Walter, or at himself, for all he knew: he fired blindly, instinctively, and by chance; but, by good providence, he happened to hit one of the two remaining burglars, and brought him to the ground with a broken leg. And now the other, seeing that the game was up, leaped down the stairs and dashed out into the darkness of the night, leaving his three companions wounded and bleeding on the floor. By this time, too, Walter had fainted; and by this time Carry, roused by the shots, had rushed into the room, calling her uncle's name and Walter's, to meet a ghastlier sight than she had ever dreamed of even; by this time George Grey had been pulled out, shivering, from under the bed, where he had hidden himself, and set to such useful work as he could perform, by Banks, who, now that he had only prostrate foes to deal with, and was master of the situation, came out grandly; and, by this time, poor Smith Butler demanded special care, for he lay as if dead, paralyzed with terror, and it was long before he could be restored.

So now there was enough to do in the house, and every one must work with a will. Of the three men wounded not one was vitally hurt; the two who had been shot were disabled, but no more; while Walter's knife-stab, just escaping the heart and grazing the lungs, was of infinitely worse com-

plexion. However, things all wore round in time. The doctor was sent for, and the constable; and between the two, the inmates and the disturbers of Gullystone were pretty well cared for. Almost as soon as it was light next day George Grey crept crestfallen homewards. Carry did not care to conceal her disdain for that cowardly act of his—how cowardly it must have seemed to her, rushing into the very midst of danger to bear her part with the rest, and share the perils, or shield from them, the one she loved, let her own braver deeds explain. The poor, meek, tortured creature could not bear his shame, but sorrowfully and miserably retreated to Grey's Court, and in a few days wrote to Smith Butler a formal renunciation of his pretensions to Miss Whiston's hand.

When Walter Lechmere made his demand, Smith Butler no longer withheld his consent; acknowledging, a little unnecessarily, that perhaps it was better, on the whole, to have a man in the establishment who could fight if required; one needed such things sometimes. But his consent was given only on consideration that Walter lives at Gullystone quietly, and does not attempt to take Caroline away, or to follow his profession in Spain, or any of that nonsense. He was to stay there as the fighting man and family protector—did he hear? and if he did not like that arrangement he should make no other.

As Walter did like the arrangement, the marriage took place in the early spring; and, if the Dunmow flitch was not claimed when justly due, it was not because it ought not to have been. But Smith Butler did not live long under the shadow of Walter's protecting manhood. The burglary and the personal violence to which he had been subject were too much for him; and he died before another Christmas-day came round, repeating, in the last feeble wanderings of reason just preceding his death, with an accent expressive of profoundest horror, 'Snowed up with a burglar!'

E. L. L.



THE STRANGE THINGS WHICH HAPPENED AT OUR CHRISTMAS PARTY.

CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERING WOMAN.

WOULD it *never* cease?' we asked, as we sat, looking out from the window, and watched the big, feathery flakes. Driven here and there in wild swirls and eddies, by the wind, 'thick as the notes that people the sunbeams,' the snow came down, obscuring the air, obliterating the ways, blurring the sharp outline of the trees, and muffling all the sounds of out-door life. For nearly a week there had been sharp frost. The ice had rung with the healthy music of the skates. And then, without the frost breaking up, the snow had begun to fall on Sunday night; it had snowed all day on Monday, all Monday night, and now, after breakfast on Tuesday morning, it was snowing as hard as ever. 'Would it *never* cease?' we asked.

Most of us, of course, hoped that it would, and, indeed, expressed considerable confidence that it would. Uncle James was good enough to give, as his reason for this confidence, the fact—a singularly remarkable one—that in all his lengthened experience, ranging now over a term of nearly seventy years, he had never yet known it fail to give up snowing, except upon one occasion.

Being questioned eagerly by Davie Gordon [æt. ten] as to the date and other attendant circumstances of this memorable occasion, he explained that it was on the *present* occasion. Whereupon Davie, not joining quite freely in the laugh at this venerable joke, and ashamed at having been caught by a snare spread in sight so openly, vowed all manner of dire vengeance. He would put holly in his uncle's bed; he would put snowballs in his boots; he would put a cracker in his pipe; he would take the glasses out of his spectacles; he would, in short, make the life of that hoary old traitor a continual torment to him. None of which threats, however, seemed greatly to disturb the serenity of placid Uncle James.

Yet I must say of Davie, however painful it may be to speak harshly of a young gentleman who is so partial to me that he overlooks the facts that I am exactly three times his age, that I am married already, and have a daughter a trifle taller than himself, and yet

considers these no obstacles in the way of his making violent love to me, and who plies me with acid drops to a degree which could hardly fail to overcome the scruples of any one not educated in the strictest notions of female propriety,—I must say that of all the atrocious Young Pickles I ever came across in my life, Davie is the worst; and that he would think no more of playing any or all of those tricks upon his uncle, or anybody else, than I think of boxing his ears, and would care just as little for any punishment that might be entailed by his pranks as he cares for that performance of mine. Davie, however, is pretty sure to obtrude himself, so I need not further obtrude him.

So far as we could see, there was then, at any rate, no sign of abatement of the storm. The postman had not yet arrived, though it was now two hours beyond his time. Bets began to be freely made and taken (by the younger and more speculative members of the family) of three, and even four to one, in filberts, that he would not arrive at all that day. The question, indeed, began to be openly mooted as to whether the trains upon our neighbouring branch railway would be able to keep running; whether they were not much more likely to be snowed up in some deep cutting; whether, supposing them even to reach our little station, three miles distant, it would be practicable for us to drive down and fetch the young folks who were on their way to eat their Christmas pudding with us.

Some of the small faces went almost as white as the snow outside, when the possibility first dawned upon them that Frank, and Tom, and Alice, and all the rest of them might, after all, have to spend their Christmas Eve at Mickleton Junction. And even we grown-up people admitted that, if we had our choice of places, Mickleton Junction was not just the one we should choose to spend any night of the year in, much less the night that we call Christmas Eve, and the good day that follows it; for I suppose that no man ever went twice to Mickleton Junction save under great stress of circumstances on his second visit; and that whoever has had the

misfortune to be stranded there once retains the liveliest recollection of that train which was so terribly behind time; that platform which was so breezy above even the breeziness of junction platforms; that waiting-room (altered, no doubt, from a bathing-machine) which was so supernaturally well ventilated in every direction except up the chimney.

And if ever I write to 'The Times,' my mind is fully made up that it shall be to ask this question, 'What is the reason, physical or metaphysical, moral, political, or economical, that a railway junction can only be constructed at some habitation of desolation that nobody in the world ever heard of before the railway junction came and the railway porters hawled it into notoriety? Why again, at these penal settlements, where we are doomed for such an uncertain term to walk (or sit if we happen to have a box to sit upon), should it be made always a rule absolute that our walking or our sitting should be so dreadfully comfortable?' But I am not writing to 'The Times' now, and perhaps may never do it, so let us '*Change here for*—' our proper subject.

Whether that old saying be true or not, that 'a green Christmas makes a fat churchyard,' it is certainly true that a white Christmas makes a warm fire-side; and such of us as had learnt the meaning of rheumatism, felt sympathetic aching of the joints whenever any poor old soul trudged past along the trackless road, and wondered if they had a warm chimney corner at the end of his journey. And one of us broke out in quotation:—

'Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,

Your looped and windowed raggedness defend you

From seasons such as these?'

And another hoped there were few houseless heads and unfed sides in our parish, or that, if there were any, they might be guided to us to be housed and fed, and sent on their way a little happier.

At last the postman did come, and Davie, whose bets in favour of the contrary event had been considerable, was presently convicted of having discharged his liabilities in filberts, every one of which had a maggot inside, that young scapegrace having learnt to distinguish them easily by the hole those creatures drill. Such a postman as he was too—a mere animated snowball. It was suggested that a ladder should be put to

his back, and some one sent up to shovel the snow from his hat. He was entreated not to shake himself near our door, lest he should make egress impossible. He told us that we might consider ourselves snowed-up already. Our neighbours (the nearest of whom, by the way, lives half a mile off) had all given up sweeping and shovelling, and were, he said, going to remain indoors till the thaw came, when they would visit each other in such boats, canoes, or washing-tubs as might be most convenient. And so the man of letters, cheery and nothing daunted, got under way again, and was quickly lost to view.

He had only brought two letters worth speaking of. One was from India, complaining of the broiling heat, and telling us of punkahs, iced water, and calico dresses, with which they would have to spend their Christmas. The other was to say that our young friends certainly meant to be with us that afternoon, and expected to be met at Thorley station, as they expressed it, 'weather or no weather.'

It was then, however, but eleven o'clock, and the train was not due at Thorley till three. It was calculated that if the road was passable at all, an hour would surely be enough for the three miles' drive. So till two o'clock there was no event to fill up the time save lunch; at least there was no event that we knew of. For even in our dull country home, eagerly as we clutch at anything we can call an event, we hardly counted it as one that a beggar woman should just have passed in at the gate, have gone round as beggars do, to the back-door, and have, as we heard, roused 'Fury' the house-dog into a state of exasperation that perfectly justified his name.

By-and-by, however, when old Margaret came in and said there was a poor woman in the kitchen whom she thought the dog had frightened out of her wits, because she could not speak a word that she—Margaret—could understand, some two or three of us went to see our strange visitor.

We soon found that she was no more mad than we were, only well nigh in despair, and exhausted. She could not speak one word of English, and we found our little stock of boarding-school French, so neglected as it was, very inadequate for conversing with her in her own tongue. It was enough for her, however, that at last she had actually found some one who had heard of France, and who knew there was such

a language as the French. When I uttered my first trembling 'Etes vous Français?' she burst into tears, and with an eager 'Oui, oui,' overwhelmed me with such a rapturous torrent of blessings, and thanks to 'le bon Dieu,' and 'le bon ciel,' as speedily put my small French to rout, and reduced me to the same state of imbecility as Margaret. She lifted up her hands and eyes *au ciel*, or at least to the ceiling, and went on with streaming eyes and with a volubility that threw us into despair almost equal to what her own had been. She could not understand at all how it was that any one who had been able to say 'Etes vous Français?' so readily, should have nothing left to say after that but 'Que dites vous?' and 'Je ne comprends.' Question after question, and explanation after explanation did she pour out upon us with a rapidity that enabled us to catch only about one word in ten. Helen's—my sister's—French being about as limited as mine, we saw there would be nothing for it but that we two should consult privately as to each question to be asked or piece of information to be given. We agreed that it would be well first to make a statement confessing our own ignorance of French except in its very simplest and most Anglicized shape. So after due deliberation we said, 'Nous ne parlons qu'un très peu de Français.' We had hesitated some time between 'très peu,' and 'très petit,' but had decided at last in favour of the former. Then after this warning we asked her as well as we could where she had come from. She said 'Debomingem,' which we knew could only mean 'from Birmingham,' that place being twelve miles away. Then with many a 'parlez plus tardement, s'il vous plait,' we got her story bit by bit. ['Parlez plus vite,' we had said at first, and the faster the poor soul talked, the more we had begged her to speak, 'plus vite,' till at last it had flashed upon us that 'vite' was not the word we wanted.] Where did she want to go? we asked. And with many a repetition, and a good deal of pantomime, we made out that she was on her way 'au lieu où l'on travaille avec la paille.' There was a straw or two lying on the kitchen floor, and she picked them up, and her nimble fingers had in an instant plaited them neatly, and pointed to one of our straw hats. 'Was it Luton?' I asked, though Luton was so far away I hardly thought it likely. 'No, no, not Luton,' she said; but yet with a brighter and more hope-

ful face, that told us we had nearly hit it. 'Dunstable?' I asked. Yes, it was Dunstable.

The poor woman's tale, in short, was this. Her husband was dead. Her two little girls were just old enough to work at the straw-plaiting, but not old enough to walk all day with her in this terrible weather. Her money had been just enough to pay their fare from Birmingham to Dunstable, and she had sent them off by rail that morning. At Dunstable they would find a good Frenchwoman who would take care of them. But she herself had not money enough to ride, so had set out to walk from Birmingham to Dunstable, a distance of some hundred miles, for which walk she had allowed herself three days. And now this morning, to begin with, she found she had got four miles out of her way. She could find no one to put her right, the snow was preventing her from walking at half the pace she had hoped to walk, and she could not in any way get to her work at the time she had promised to be there. She was a strong, coarse-featured woman; evidently very poor, and not at all sentimental. But she did not beg, either directly or indirectly. She was evidently careful to avoid it. She warmed herself by the fire, and drank a glass of ale, being urged to do so. But when pressed also to sit down and eat she said no, with many thanks, and begged us to direct her on her way as well as we could.

It was not very easy to do this: but we did our best. We took her where we had a large map of England hanging,—lifted it down and spread it before her, her eyes glistening with instant intelligence of our object. Then we showed her where she was, and through what villages she would have to pass before she got to Warwick. And we printed each name in succession on a large card, with the distance from place to place in miles as near as we could tell. So far to Warwick, so far to Leamington, to Fenny Compton, to Banbury, to Buckingham, Leighton, Dunstable. And we made her repeat each name after us as well as she could, from *Var-ick* down to *Don-stable*. And we taught her one sentence of English, 'I want to go to —.' With this sentence, and her card, on which if she failed to pronounce the name she could point it out to any one who could read, we were hopeful, and she was hopeful that she would steer her way without mishap.

Before she went she took out her little well-worn purse and counted her small



Drawn by H. Barnes.

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capital,—two shillings and some coppers. She asked us what we thought might be the railway fare from Banbury to Leighton, and we told her as near as we could guess. Then she shut her purse and shook her head in a way that said she must walk it all. But being pressed to take some little help to make up the fare for this part of the journey, she took it,—not without reluctance. Only once her courage seemed to fail her. When my sister's little boy, a rosy little fellow, eighteen months old, suddenly began crying to go to her, she took him into her arms, kissed him, and cried over him, thinking, no doubt, of her own little ones and their loneliness at this happy Christmas time. Then as she was going away, she turned to look back, and saw the child stretching out his arms to her again, and again she returned, took him up and kissed him. At last, setting herself steadily to her work, with many broken thanks, she left us, and was soon out of sight, leaving all of us as thankful as she was, that the storm had moderated a little, though it was yet far from fair weather.

And this was the episode of the wandering Frenchwoman. It served us, you may be sure, for conversation over our lunch. How sorry we were that we had not given her an envelope, ready addressed, that she might have written to us, or, at any rate, have posted the empty envelope to us at Dunstable to tell us she had got to her journey's end! But now she was gone and we should never see or hear of her more.

CHAPTER II.

FOUR BERTIE.

If Kitty had not been the very best little mare that ever drew a waggonette behind her, she never would have got to Thorley station. It had given up snowing and the sun was shining a little. So, as we thought there would be room enough, coming back, I was tempted to brave the weather and go down with Sam to meet the train.

For thirty years there had been no such snow-storm known in this part of England. As we drove along,—if I should not rather call it ploughing,—the corn ricks showed like so many tumuli. Even the highest hedgerows could only be traced as long, sharp ridges, for the snow had drifted against them till all was buried save here and there a tree. There was a mile of common land, newly enclosed, which we had to cross, and here where all was level, and the fences were low, it was simply one great

stretch of white, where to keep the road was no easy matter. Sam, however, was a practised hand, and knew every tree and every stoneheap in the neighbourhood, so, though we were apparently the first who had ventured to drive along this road that day, we had no fear. So far as appearances went it is true that Kitty might have been a horse without legs; and when, from time to time, she stepped into a drift a little deeper than usual, the wagonette might have been without wheels, so completely were they buried. She looked round now and then in a manner that asked Sam, all but audibly, if he was quite sure he was not making a mistake, and if he did not think he had better give it up as a bad job, and let her turn round and go home again. Sooner than do this, however, Sam would have cleared the road with a shovel and drawn the wagonette himself; so Kitty being assured authoritatively that there really was no mistake at all about it, went on with her work again with a better will than ever, and in due time landed us at the station, and was rewarded with many words of encouragement and praise, dear to the equine mind as to the human, was petted and caressed, and while we stood waiting for the train, was indulged in the luxury of having her ears well pulled to a degree that made amends to her for all hard work.

Thanks mainly to the necessity of running extra trains at Christmas time, our branch line had with great difficulty been kept open. The trains were running, and the train for which we had to wait was not more than a quarter of an hour late, which, for Christmas Eve, we all admitted was a marvel of punctuality.

Long before we saw them we could hear our young folks. They were chafing the station-master, telling him 'they'd got no tickets;' 'How could they be bothered with tickets?' advising him to 'Go to Jericho,' to 'jump up,' and to do other things which certainly form no part of a station-master's ordinary duties. In due time, of course, the tickets were forthcoming, and the young prisoners were discharged from custody. Then such a rush as there was to me! how the lads admitted, nevertheless, that Alice had a right to the first kiss, and helped her up to get it accordingly; how they declared there never was such glorious weather, and must needs have a good game of snow-balling before they would get into the trap; how Sam's hat was at once selected as a most convenient target, until Sam made signs of

getting down to roll them; how at last they were all got in, the door shut upon them, and I was able to take stock of who had come;—all this will be taken as told, without my being at the trouble of telling it.

The new arrivals, then, were five in number. Let me introduce them as briefly as I can. First—at least first to me—there was 'Papa': not my own papa, but my children's. He had sent me on before with the younger children a day or two earlier. He had been unable to come himself till now, and so had kept Alice, our eldest girl, at home with him for company, and brought her now. Next was this Alice,—a shy thing of nine years old, but remembering already five or six of these Christmases at grandpapa's, and counting them always as the happiest days of her year. These two had travelled further than the rest, and had only been joined by them at Chesterley. The third was my younger brother Edwin, usher at Chesterley school, unmarried, and, as I tell him, likely to remain so, unless he speedily alter his mooning, bookish ways, give up wearing green spectacles, and devote more of his time to pic-nics and less to the 'ologies.' The two boys who were with him were supposed to be travelling under his control, but Edwin admitted that the supposition was entirely without foundation, and that he was much more under theirs. The boys were Frank, aged fourteen, and Tom, aged twelve, brothers both and Gordons both, as indeed all of us are in this story, save Edwin, my brother, who is, as I was, a Fletcher.

If the reader wants to have placed before him all the mysteries of our family relationships, I can promise speedily to reduce him to complete bewilderment. If he is willing to content himself with hearing uncles called uncles, and cousins cousins, without requiring explanations as to the manner in which such relationships come about, then I am ready to give him my word of honour as a lady that it is all right, and further to assure him that he saves me from recounting, and himself from reading, a most bewildering genealogy. Suffice it for the present, that I say this much, Frank and Tom are our nephews on my husband's side. Their father is dead. Their grandfather is the Uncle James of whom you have heard. Uncle James is brother—younger brother—to my husband's father, called always, in these pages, 'grandpapa.' The youngest brother of these old people died, leaving only one child, the Davie of whom I

spoke, and consequently Davie, aged ten, is uncle to Frank, aged twelve, and Tom, aged ten. This much, as the lawyers would say, by way of interpretation clause.

Driving home was hardly any easier a task than driving out had been. For though we certainly had our own track to drive back upon there was the added weight of five new passengers, which even to Kitty was no joke on such a day as this. The boys, however, declared it splendid, and the more likelihood there was of our sticking fast, the more splendid they declared it, the more glad they were to jump out behind, and, under pretence of pushing the trap, roll each other in the snow, and put snowballs down each other's backs. On our way home we met two or three other vehicles, and at all cross-roads could see that heavy as had been the snow, it had not been heavy enough to keep English people indoors who had the excuses of hospitality for going out.

Home at last, just as the shades of night were falling rapidly, and just as the firelight began to redden the window-panes. Then the bustle of hand-shaking, kissing, uncosting, and finger-warming. Then the first general inquiries about school, and lessons, and prizes, about skating and sliding, about home and home friends. All these things were over, and the lads were sitting or standing round the fire, while Helen and I were busy with our decorations, twisting wreaths of holly round the pictures and mirrors, and pricking our fingers till they bled in doing so. Suddenly Frank called out to Helen, 'But, aunt, where's Bertie—I have not seen him?'

'Oh, he's asleep,' said Helen; 'you'll see him and hear him too by-and-by.' Then, as if reminded by this, she left her holly-wreaths and ran upstairs to see if all the recent noise had not waked him. In a minute she was down again, and said, 'He's not in his cot; some of them have got him in the kitchen; run, Frank, and fetch him.'

Soon Frank was back again, and back without the baby. Then the mother began to run about the house searching, and to grow uneasy. One of the maids, however, had been sent some half-hour ago to a neighbour's, and was expected back directly. It was presumed, though no one had seen her take him, that she had the baby with her. In a few minutes she came in;—and knew nothing of baby Bertie.

Reader, did you ever happen to lose a baby? You have, I make no doubt,

lost your hat, your gloves, your cane, or perhaps your purse, and have thought these no small annoyances. You may have thought even, when pestered by somebody else's unruly baby (and other people's babies always are unruly), that to lose it would be a very endurable affliction. But believe me, when it comes to the point, it is a very distressing thing either to lose your own, or to be with any one else who has lost her baby—lost it, I mean, even merely for the moment, or, as one might say, mislaid it—for of that other and more awful one which is never made good again by any finding in this world, or of a mother's anguish in presence of such loss it would ill become me, a mother, to speak lightly.

Now, baby Bertie was eighteen months old, and had just discontinued crawling and taken to walking. His little feet were for ever pattering from room to room. His little hands were for ever laying hold of friendly skirts and coat-tails. His little legs were for ever carrying him slowly upstairs and tumbling him down again with much greater rapidity. Bertie, in short, had just got to that age that when in sight he was in everybody's way, and when out of sight he was a cause of constant terror lest he should come to mischief. It was only when he was asleep that he was considered safe, and that his nurse-maid dared to turn her eyes from him. And now he had effectually given her and all of us the slip. At first, of course, we all of us, except Helen, made light of the missing baby, being sure enough that he would be found in some ridiculously safe corner. It is a large house with many a spare room and closet in which a child could hide, and it took us some time to look through them all. But through them all we looked not once, nor twice, but many times, without finding a trace of him. Then through the barns, the cowhouses, the stables, the very pigsties, and every out-office of the place we went with lanterns and candles, seeking Bertie and finding him not, calling Bertie and getting no answer. Once more through them all, turning over every heap of straw, removing everything that stood beside a wall lest he should be behind it, and all in vain. All our faces had gradually grown pale enough, but my poor sister had the paleness of death. She flew about from place to place amongst us with hands clenched, moaning after her pretty Bertie, her own darling, her pet—and shedding never a tear. It was awful to see her agony.

Then we set ourselves to search outside the gates, holding our lanterns carefully to the ground, and all at once in the deep clean snow we saw the print of little feet amongst larger feet. Away down the road we followed them, always tracing them easily amongst men's feet and horses' feet for full two hundred yards away from the house. There we found the mark of where our little man had set himself down to rest, and there, alas! we found one of his little boots, with a sock in it, and from that point forward could trace the little footprints still, the mark of the boot and the mark of the wee naked toes now side by side. Some fifty yards or so, however, from where we found the boot there were signs of his having wandered from the road into the deep snow; there were signs of tramping there by other feet, and there all trace was lost. Not another footmark could we find beyond this point, nor any footmark that indicated that he had turned to go home again. It was clear that our little man had first wandered outside the gate, had been at once confused by the snow, and lost his way; had wandered on and on, further away from home (we fancied how the poor little thing cried, heartbroken), and had at last lain down overcome with cold, and—slept.

Had slept! Ah, God! and what did this mean? To sleep in the snow on such a night! It was freezing keenly, and the keen night wind seemed to blow through and through us as we looked at each other in the icy moonlight. We asked ourselves what sleep in the snow there would mean for us strong, grown-up men and women; and what it must have meant for that tender child. He had been picked up, it seemed, by some one, and carried off. Was it not to be feared that he had been picked up asleep, sleeping the everlasting sleep? For alas! how few minutes of that cold bed would have sufficed to freeze the little life's blood and stiffen the little limbs! Was it not clear that if he had been picked up in time he would, infant though he was, have made himself understood, and been carried home. He had been picked up, we could not doubt, by a passing stranger, who could learn nothing from the poor stiffened lips.

And all this while the poor mother was with us. But now at last by main force she had to be taken home, and I with her, while the search was continued without us.

At every neighbouring house our people called, hoping to gain some clue, but gaining none. At every house, as

soon as it was known what the trouble was which sent these white faces from neighbour Gordon's to break in upon their happy Christmas Eve, some stout-hearted fellow was ready to rise and join the searchers.

Once more the willing Kitty—ready always to run if needed till she dropped—was harnessed, and away drove my husband and Edwin down the great south road, hoping to overtake some one who could give them tidings of the missing child.

A circle was marked out, round which our neighbours could search, dividing themselves, along with our own labourers, into groups, and meet again at our house in two hours' time. Some of these wanted to take Fury with them, but Fury, seemingly confused or frightened by the lights, snarled, backed into his kennel, and refused to leave it. How we longed then for a St. Bernard dog, well used to searching in the snow!

How wearisome was that search, and how eagerly conducted; or how much more wearisome the terrible waiting at home, to me, to Helen, and to the aged men who had with difficulty been kept at home, I need not tell. God forbid that I should ever again be witness to such agonizing distress as that of my poor sister! She sat and swayed herself to and fro, moaning low, and refused to be comforted. Then she left us, and by-and-by I found her kneeling at her bedside—better, I hoped, for the tears which had come, but little short of crazed with grief.

And so the two weary hours—seeming a whole night rather—wore away, and at last we heard our friends at the gate again, talking low, as if in consultation, and then we heard quiet 'good-nights,' and heard Kitty led slowly away, and heard the footsteps of two or three coming into the kitchen, quietly, and not speaking to each other. And we looked into each other's faces with dull, leaden eyes, and no one rose to go and ask the news.

It was like a house into which death has entered with its unwonted silence and quiet. The very dog shared in the general gloom, and allowed any one who liked to pass and re-pass without a bark or a motion, as if it knew that the house had lost its treasure, and that there was no need for it to keep watch and guard any more.

Then came in my husband and Edwin. Their news was soon told. They had driven along the south road for about an hour, till they had overtaken a poor woman whom they questioned as to who

had passed her. It proved to be our poor Frenchwoman, and as Edwin talks French fluently, they soon learnt from her that no one had passed her who could by any possibility know anything of the child. The poor creature had had to stay and rest so often that she had made hardly any progress on her journey, and was already longing for any place where she could stay the night. She soon gathered from Edwin that the lost child was he whom she had fondled in the morning, and then she forgot her own care and eagerness to pursue her way, and begged to be taken back to help in the search. So they had brought her with them, and she was wandering about alone with a lantern, not content till she had looked for herself into all the places where we had all looked before her.

The sad summary of it all was that no one, of all who had been searching, had gained the slightest trace of poor lost Bertie.

Then at last Helen seemed at once to change her mood, and tried even to strengthen our minds, and to set us an example of resignation. She appeared to have realised the worst, to have given up all hope; but instead of letting her despair quite overwhelm her, was trying to carry her care and lay it upon Him who careth for us. It was with her as with the king who was stricken in like manner. While there had been any hope she had mourned, and wept, and prayed, and said, 'Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? Who can tell?' But now that hope was gone, she had dried her eyes, and said in her heart, 'Wherefore should I weep? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.'

CHAPTER III.

NARROW ESCAPE OF MADAME GUILLOT.

I hope the reader will never make one to sit in so sad a circle as that which gathered about our fire when the search was stayed. The great Italian poet indicates it as the heaviest of all griefs, to remember in our misery the happy days that are gone. But our sorrow had come upon us in the very midst of our preparations for the merriest night of all the year. The bright-green leaves and the scarlet berries glistened all round us as the merry fire-light rose and fell. The big Christmas tree stood in its pride, decked with all its fruit of toys and presents and loving inscriptions. Tables groaned under the

jolly Christmas cheer that waited for the spit, for the oven, for the furnace. Pot-bellied bottles sealed with wax, delicately tapering bottles well secured with linden tissues, glasses of all shapes, cakes, and nuts and fruit—what a merry bustle there had been amongst us in preparing all these! And now, there was not one of us to whom the sight of them did not, by force of contrast, give an added pang.

You are not to suppose that the search was abandoned. We were sitting only while we could decide what to do next. Not one of us but felt that it would be more endurable to wander searching, even against hope, amongst the snow through all the livelong night, than to sit there nursing our own and thoughts.

We might have sat in this way perhaps half an hour—all of us together except Davie and Frank, who were still out with the Frenchwoman—when suddenly we were startled by a loud scream of fright, repeated two or three times, and each time checked, as it seemed, by force, and accompanied by a sharp, savage growl.

Rushing out to the back door, whence the sound came, we found poor Madame Guillot (for this was her name) on her back, securely held down by Fury, whom Davie and Frank were trying to remove, without success. Fury's heavy paw was flung across her throat, and it was only when he raised it for an instant that Madame was able to scream. When she did scream, she was at once checked by the downcoming of the heavy paw, accompanied by a terrific growl and an admonitory shaking of her ample petticoats. Beyond her fright and her shaking, the good woman was none the worse, and of these she seemed to think little, for the instant we had her on her feet, she broke from us and rushed again into the very jaws of Fury, screaming, '*Le petit soulier! le petit soulier!*' Fury, however, was too many for her, and instantly had her on her back as before.

But Helen had seen it now. There it was indeed, 'the little shoe!'—the second red shoe, companion to the one found in the lane. It was lying just inside Fury's kennel, and the light fell full upon it from the lantern. In an instant Helen had it in her hand, and found that not only was it the missing shoe, but that one of the missing feet was inside it—nay, that one of the missing legs was attached to the foot, and the whole of the rest of the missing body attached to the leg! By that leg, in fact, the missing Bertie was dragged out,

covered with straw, busily rubbing his eyes with his little fists, and just waking up from a very sound sleep in which he had been indulging in Fury's apartment. Fury, seeing that he had lost his ward, at once liberated Madame Guillot of his own accord, and pushing his big nose in amongst us, began to assist Bertie to wake, by vigorously licking his face, till Helen snatching him up, rushed with him into the house.

We, looking into the kennel, saw where he had made his little nest. It was in the corner, completely out of sight, and sheltered from the wind. He had nestled into the clean straw with which Fury is always well supplied, and then it was pretty clear that Fury had lain down beside him, if not upon him, and had cuddled him up as warmly as if he had been in his mother's arms. We understood now why the dog had refused to go out and search with us, and why he had barked so little all through the night.

It was not so easy to understand how the child had got back and got into the kennel, without leaving a trace of a returning footstep. And this mystery was not cleared up to us till next day. The explanation, however, was simple enough, and might as well be given at once. A schoolboy had met him wandering away, and knowing him, had lifted him up and carried him home, had been afraid to pass the dog, and so had set him down to run in at the open kitchen door. Bertie, instead of doing so, had turned in at Fury's door, which happened to be nearer, and had instantly gone to sleep, while the schoolboy had posted off to a village some few miles away.

We did not trouble ourselves greatly that night about the explanation, or the absence of it. All that we cared to know was, that this our child who had been dead was alive again—who had been lost was found.

I am afraid Helen quite omitted to whip the little rascal for having given so much trouble; and I am afraid we all omitted to blame Helen for sparing him. To judge, indeed, by the way he was fondled, and borrowed, and passed from one to the other, Bertie might have done something very meritorious. Davie almost choked him with kisses, and might possibly have done so out and out, had not Frank come to the rescue, and held the baby up above his small uncle's head; for Frank is a good

deal taller and stronger than his uncle Davie, and plays the tyrant with that relative to a great extent. [For example, it cannot be agreeable to be called 'venerable' by a nephew two years older than one's self, and he himself only twelve; to be ordered off to sit with the 'other uncles,' who are six or seven times one's own age; to be petitioned for cast-off clothes which would be far too small for the petitioner, and asked for loans of silver and gold when it is well known we never possess any coin more valuable than copper.]

As for the mother, it was in some respects almost as touching to see her joy as it had been to see her sorrow. For was not Bertie her one child, and she a widow? and what more could I say to tell you that both joy and sorrow were the keenest that can thrill this mortal body. Let me drop the veil.

Poor Madame Guillot we found sitting by the kitchen fire, silent, but very cheerful. To let her remain there, however, was out of the question. We brought her to our own bright room, and made her join us and stay with us there. The good creature was evidently overawed at first by the sight of what seemed to her our grandeur, but was in reality our solid English comfort. But, thanks to Edwin, who sat next her and kept talking to her in her own tongue, and interpreting for her, and explaining to her our English ways and Christmas customs, she soon grew as happy and as merry as the rest of us. And when supper came she ate with so evident an appetite, that it did one good to see her, and quite sharpened the appetites of the rest of us. And when the glasses were filled from the narrow-necked bottles, and we drank to 'absent friends,' she pledged 'les pauvres petites à Dunstable.'

Then too, as the night wore on and the logs burnt low, and the good old games began to lose their freshness, who was so valuable as Madame Guillot, teaching us all manner of new games and tricks which were old enough to her, and at which she had herself played when a child in her own land? She could sing too, and gave us a little song with a chorus—

'Autour du feu qu'on se presse,
Chaudrons nous, chauffons nous bien,'

holding her hands to the fire and rubbing them the while. And Edwin translating, told the boys it meant—

'Around the fire, let us press
And warm ourselves—'

so they too joined in with a 'ahofong noo,' and rubbed their hands as if they were perishing with cold. Then, as for dancing; I thought Madame would have danced Davie's legs off, and she actually did dance both his shoes off, and allowed him no chance of recovering them till the dancing was over. Neither fiddler nor wasel I am sure ever fiddled or popped at such a rate before, and I suppose they would have gone on all night, had not the sharp voice of grandpapa pulled them up.

'Stop there!' he cried; 'throw up the windows.' His quick ear had caught the strains of music outside, piercing through all the din of ours. Up went the windows; the bright stars shone in clear and tremulous; the moon, with a fleecy cloud or two, rode high above us; the keen frosty air rushed in; we tied our handkerchiefs about our heads, and leaned out and listened to the waits—

'Christians, awake! salute the happy morn
Whereon the Saviour of mankind was born.'

It was true, indeed, that the blessed morning had arrived, the night had gone, and it was Christmas Day. The waits finished their anthem and came in, muffled up to the eyes, but still, as it seemed, able to find or make a way to their mouths. Then they bade us good-night, and went their way to awaken other Christians, who perhaps had slept as little as we. And next we bade good-night to each other, and before going to bed, we had all of us a final look at Bertie, kissing him as he lay asleep.

Madame Guillot spent the Christmas Day with us, and on the following morning we drove her down to Thorley station, and saw her off with a through ticket in her pocket to Dunstable.



THE CHRISTMAS SAMARITAN.

THE shadows of even were falling fast
Over the drifted snow,
Gay lights from the windows flickered and danced
On the busy crowd below.

'Twas Christmas Eve! and the thoroughfares
Teemed with a motley throng,
Here one with his neighbour bandied a jest,
There whistled a snatch of song.

Crouching I saw in a doorway dark
A weary, a fearful sight,
Out of the whirl of the wayfarers all,
Out of the maddening light,

A girl, or something in shape of one—
Heaven knows how she came so low—
Gnawing her fingers for misery,
Trailing her rags in the snow.

There passed a sempstress, wasted and wan—
O God, there *are* angels still
Enshrined in the humblest, holiest forms,
Ready to do Thy will!

'Twas a hard, hard task for that workwoman
To keep body and soul together,
To find a crust for the hunger-fiend,
And a shed from the biting weather.

A moment—ah, *true* Samaritan,
Thou hast heard of the widow's mite;
Thou hast not a heart that can look unmoved
On that doorway, and on that sight!

* * * * *

Then held she forth her transparent palm
With her hard-earned penny fee,
'I am poor, now poor, God only knows,
But thou wantest it more than me.'

Mechanically took the starving girl
From the blessed sister-hand
The small copper coin that might match the gold—
Yes, the *gold* of this Christian land.

For it brought new life to a starving frame,
Though it only purchased a roll;
And it brought a greater blessing than that,
New *hope* to a starving *soul*.

Her white lips moved, but never a word,
Never a word spoke she:
Oh, woman, as thou to thy neighbour deal'st
Will God deal unto thee!

AWTLEY H. BALDWIN.



View of the East window.

View of the East window, looking down the
 West end of the church.

View of the Chapel from the East.

THE CHRISTMAS SAMARITAN.

THE shadows of even were falling fast
 Over the drifted snow,
 Gay lights from the windows flickered and danced
 On the busy crowd below.

"Twas Christmas Eve! and the thoroughfare
 Borne with a motley throng;
 Here one with his neighbour handled a jest,
 There whistled a snatch of song.

Crashing I saw in a doorway dark
 A woe, a fearful sight,
 Out of the whirl of the wayfaring all,
 Out of the maddening light.

A girl, or something in shape of one—
 Heaven knows how she came so low—
 Drawing her fingers for misery,
 Trailing her tress in the snow.

There passed a messenger, beautiful and true—
 To him, "Where is my sister?"
 "Kneeling in the hall the mother came,
 Gladly he did her bring."

Twas a hand, laid laid for that workwoman
 To keep fast and true together,
 To bind a rope for the frayed thread,
 And a shield from the biting weather.

A nodding—oh, true Samaritan,
 Thou hast heard of the widow's mite;
 Thou hast not a heart that can look unmoved
 On that doorway, and on that sight!

Thou hast the birth her transparent pain
 With her hard-earned penny fee,
 "I can give, more than thou dost only know,
 But thou wastest it more than we."

Motherly look the starving girl
 From the faded mother's hand
 "Thou wastest more than that might match the gold—
 Yes, the gold of this Christian land."

For it brought new life to a starving frame,
 Though it only purchased a roll;
 And it brought a greater blessing than that,
 New hope to a starving soul.

Her white lips moved, but never a word,
 Never a word spoke she;
 Oh, woman, art thou to thy neighbour dead?
 Will God deal into thee!

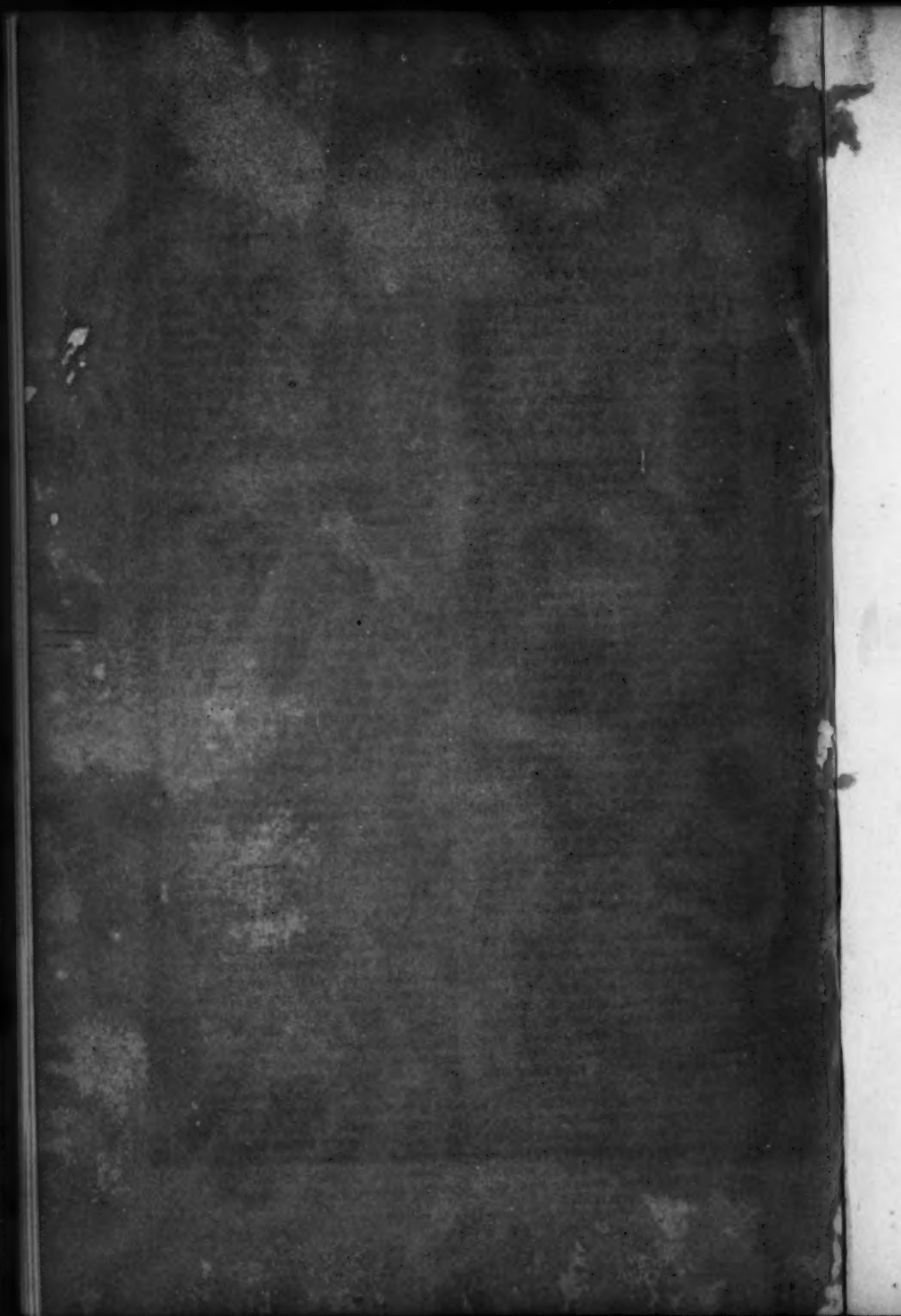
ANONYMOUS.



Drawn by M. Eden Edwards.

*"And it brought a greater blessing than that,
New hope to a starving soul."*

[See "The Christmas Samaritan."



A CHRISTMAS AT OLDMINSTER.

By MARY HOWITT.

If I have not written about life in the capital, I have written about human nature, and that is the same whether in town or country.—AUTHOR, *loc.*

CHAPTER I.

ONE always thinks of country parsonages as of little earthly paradises—as domestic forecourts of heaven. They are, in truth, so often the abodes of learning, piety, and the home virtues, to say nothing of the good taste and elegance which characterise them, that there is abundant reason for the pre-judgment of favour which they may obtain from us.

But things are not always exactly as they seem. What condition of life, indeed, is perfect even under the most favourable circumstances?

When, therefore, you saw the parsonage-house of Cherrington in Northumberland, standing purely white, amidst its old black-green fir-trees and its more modern planting, overlooking the sea, and encircled by a garden brilliant with flowers, spite even of the northern climate, and with surroundings of picturesque landscape, rich in many famous memories, you were disposed to say, 'Here is a human paradise! What man or woman would desire more than they could certainly find here?'

True. But that was the outside of things. Any one who knew that parsonage would have said that all was not quite as perfect as it seemed to be.

The incumbent, the Rev. William Burnside, was an old man at the time when I first introduce him to my readers. He was upwards of seventy, and old for his years; neither was he one of those more liberal and enlightened clergymen who are, at the present day, an honour to the church.

He was also deaf and rheumatic, for Cherrington stood high amidst ancient moorlands, and the north-east sea-winds gave an icy chilliness to the air for nine months in the year. Spite, therefore, of all that had been done to exclude draughts from the sitting-rooms, the master of the house was a martyr to rheumatism, which had somewhat stiffened his temper as well as his limbs.

He married in middle life, for he had been many years a curate before he was fortunate enough to become incumbent of Cherrington; therefore he was turned fifty when he brought hither a wife, much younger than himself; and she

being a delicate south-country lady suffered much from the climate. Nevertheless, she bore it, and many other things, patiently, and bringing with her elegant tastes, remodelled the house, for her husband in this respect let her have her own way, laid out the garden and planted the belt of younger wood round it to keep off the cold north-east wind. In short, she was, in every way, a spirit of love and gentle amelioration, in a trying atmosphere, both naturally and morally.

She became the mother of several children, but they, probably inheriting the delicacy of her constitution, all passed away like flowers nipped by early frosts, with the exception of one daughter, the first-born, who remained to be the dear companion of her mother, and then the gentle lady herself faded away in so long and unobtrusive an illness that when it began no one could say, and all were astonished by its fatal close; for she was apparently in the same state on the last day of her life as she had been for years.

When she was gone, the widower and his daughter Mary, now seventeen, felt appalled by the utter blank which the removal of this one quiet life from theirs had made.

But days and weeks and months pass on, let the tribulation be what it may.

Twelve months after her departure the externals of the lives of the clergyman and his daughter were very much what they had been for years. The house was as orderly, the garden as gay with flowers, the poor parishioners as duly and affectionately visited; for, in her mother's long invalidism, Mary had come to be the executive spirit of the household, as well as in such parochial duties and deeds of charity as the pastor's wife would otherwise have performed. The pastor himself went through his sacred duties as formerly, and as he had long been deaf and somewhat dull, nobody thought it much if he were deafer and duller than ever; and if he were not seen so frequently in the remoter parts of his parish, it was attributed to sorrow rather than to his increasing decrepitude.

Thus three years went on, Mary becoming ever more efficiently active in

her duties as the clergyman's daughter, and willing, if her father had permitted, to do still more, for she was zealous in every advancing step of that moral improvement which nobly exalts the present age over the past. But her father was a man of the old school, and as he grew more infirm he clung even faster to his old habits and views. He had always been self-willed and dogmatical, now he was becoming still more so, and Mary's young experience had many painful threads woven into it.

The old rector was now near seventy-five, and so infirm that his parishioners urged upon him to employ a curate. This had been already suggested, but was then extremely offensive to him. Now he listened to it, with somewhat of an ill-grace perhaps, but finally consented; and a curate, the Rev. John Selwyn, was engaged. This young man having passed a brilliant career at college, where he gained the friendship of a young nobleman, and afterwards travelled with him for a year on the Continent, now took this insignificant duty, to occupy an interval of waiting for the rich rectory of Combe-bury, a living in the gift of his friend's noble family, which they had promised him on the demise of the present incumbent, also an aged man.

It might naturally be supposed to be a dull life for a young man of five-and-twenty, whose time for the last several years had been full of gay variety in association with his equals in intellectual acquirements and his superiors in rank. So it must have been had he not been gifted with a cheerful spirit, willing to see the bright side of everything, and even at the worst to regard this as simply a resting-place till his larger and higher sphere of duty claimed him.

The growing infirmities of the old man's temper and character did not trouble him much, for it must be confessed that he soon proved so efficient in the pulpit and so desirable an associate in the domestic circle, that he would have conceded anything rather than lose him. The only consideration, indeed, that now troubled him was that he could not depend upon him permanently. The other old incumbent would die some day, and he must be his successor. This was an unpleasant reflection to him of Cherrington, though I must confess it was by no means so to the young man, who had now additional reason for looking forward to it with impatient hope.

My readers will probably readily imagine why so, as it was a very natural

cause, circumstanced as he was. It was simply this, that he had fallen deeply in love with sweet Mary Burnside. Nobody in his case, with his fine appreciation of female excellence, could have done otherwise. Yet he was no novice to the society even of the loveliest and most accomplished women which the best circles, either of this country or the Continent, afforded. Nor yet was he one to be dazzled by the first pretty face that smiled to him across the tea-table or in a country walk. He was a man who knew the world, whose heart was under his own control, and whose fancy would never run away with his judgment. But in this case, both heart and judgment were satisfied; and, in truth, it was less the gentle beauty of the countenance, and the perfect grace of every movement, than the lovely, unassuming character, the self-forgetting devotion of daughterly duty, which won him irresistibly from their first dwelling together.

Still he was in no hurry to declare his affection, though Mary herself, who could not, on her part, close her eyes to his many attractive qualities, felt long before he avowed himself, that she had won his affections; and unspeakably happy, and still more lovely, did this silent, sweet knowledge make her. Thus love, based on esteem, shot down very deep roots into her being, and when, in the second year, the young curate avowed his love, she almost proudly confessed hers. Her father, of course, gave his cheerful consent and blessing, and all was joyous almost as if they were married.

In their perfect confidence and knowledge of each other, the young curate implored that their marriage might at once take place, but her father would not consent. He was a prudent man, he said, and must see his affianced son-in-law in a better position than that of a curate before he consented to the marriage. His own living was small, and having come only late into the possession, he had been able to save very little, besides which his wife's long illness, and now the necessity of having a curate, required his whole income. And who could say how long Selwyn would have to wait for the rectory of Combe-bury? He might be five-and-twenty years a curate as he himself had been, yet he had never taken a wife all those years.

The natural obstinacy and implacability of his temper showed itself thus. The lover was greatly displeased. Mary excused her father, and then the subject

dropped, and the young people made themselves happy in being lovers.

The two old rectors of Cherrington and Combe-bury seemed as if living one against the other. The old man of Cherrington, in fact, though he now scarcely left the house, and was more touchy and obstinate than ever, seemed, as he approached eighty, to have had a new lease of life granted to him. He might apparently last for another ten years. Just, however, when they said that the old man of Combe-bury would assuredly live for ever, he very quietly passed away in his sleep.

The news came express, three hundred miles to Cherrington. Let us hope that there was joy amongst the angels in heaven over the old rector's arrival there, seeing that there was so much joy on earth on his having departed thence. We cannot blame them, however, for rejoicing; it was very natural. And now the first thought of the Rev. John Selwyn was, that his Mary would be his wife. But he counted without his host.

If he had been bound by one old man, Mary was still also bound by another. Her father felt grieved and offended that the first thought should be the depriving him of his daughter, and he refused his consent for the present; therefore the so-long-expectant rector took possession of his living in one of the most beautiful counties of England, amidst the most paradisaical circumstances of locality and association, with a very dissatisfied mind.

The hall, the church, and the parsonage of Combe-bury all stood grouped together, yet not too near to be obtrusive the one on the other, forming, however, an entire and harmonious whole, like emblems of the most favoured features of English society, wealth, religion, and domestic life. The young rector had no idea of so rare and perfect a lot falling to his share, and with a truly generous and affectionate emotion, he surveyed all more with reference to Mary than himself.

The residents of the hall were simply a gentleman, Mr. Yorke, and his young daughter, similar, in respect of relational circumstances, to the home he had left, but with the most marked difference.

Miss Yorke, now about eighteen, was not less lovely than Mary Burnside, but more blooming, and altogether care-free, whilst her father, hardly more than middle-aged, was a man of active habits, joyous and open as the day. A great lover of a country life and field-

sports, he spent half the year at his beautiful country-seat, and the remainder either abroad or in London for the sake of his daughter.

Both father and daughter received the young clergyman, now their close neighbour, with the greatest hospitality. His pleasing exterior and manners won, indeed, all hearts, and a life of the most genial and attractive character opened before him.

The parsonage-house was in such perfect order that nothing was needed but to furnish it anew to his taste, and bring his wife here at once. His new friends were aware of his engagement to his late rector's daughter, and this seemed still more to recommend him. They were impatient to have his wife amongst them, and to show her the kindness which they already felt towards her for his sake.

Poor Mary! she did not come. But that was no fault of hers. Her father was now worried and angered by a new annoyance, by the curates who succeeded her betrothed, one after another, each apparently more unfit than his predecessor, and all equally incapable of living or working with her father. He was now seriously ill with his new vexation, and she herself, unwilling to leave him in this unhappy state, besought of her lover to postpone the marriage yet for a little time.

The young rector of Combe-bury thought that he had a right to demand his wife, and went up to Cherrington for that purpose. Here finding the case more hopeless than he had imagined, and believing certainly that the old man could not live many months, nothing was said to him on the subject of their marriage, which, as it was now winter, they mutually agreed to defer till spring. When spring came the young rector again visited Cherrington, and now the old man, being settled with a curate to his mind, appeared in his usual health, and with it all the old impediments against parting with his daughter rose up as formidably as ever. Mary besought of her lover that her father might reside with them, for this seemed to her the only means by which this great obstacle could be overcome. Selwyn consented cheerfully. He said, and he felt, that he would consent to anything if he could but see any prospect of accomplishing his marriage.

But the old man would not hear of it. He brought forward so many objections, and that with so much anger, and in so offensive a spirit, that both the young people felt that it was better still

to wait than take such an inmate to their home. A perfectly blank hopelessness seemed now to stand before them; for whilst this obstinate, unmanageable man lived there was no chance of their union, unless by an absolute breach between him and themselves.

They parted, Mary promising to inform her lover the first moment any change, either in life or death, took place. Nothing could possibly be more painful. Selwyn now wholly discontinued his visits, as being the most prudent, and in this way two years went on.

The woman must, in every case of this kind, be by far the greater sufferer; and in this particular instance Mary's duties were hard and irksome, and her days very wearisome. He, on the contrary, was surrounded with many pleasurable circumstances, and many kind and cheerful friends, none of whom showed him more sympathy than the father and daughter at the hall, who, not fully knowing the case, thought that his affianced wife was treating him heartlessly if not cruelly.

It is difficult to say why a useless, burdensome life, like that of the old rector's, was spared so long. Perhaps it might be to teach his daughter patient submission and long-suffering. He many times said that she and Selwyn wished him dead, and again he would petulantly bid her leave him and get married. It was almost more than she could bear.

For another twelve months Selwyn did not visit Cherrington. It was no use his coming, unless he could take away his wife; there was, therefore, a tacit understanding between them, that until that time arrived it was better not to come. He also wrote less frequently; for what was there to tell her but of his own happier life and the great kindness of his friends? and by degrees he grew shy even of this topic—he said, because it contrasted so painfully with her life.

All his truest friends wished him married, fancying that they perceived a deterioration of character, and seeing temptation to any man in this long trial of endurance. Many, too, were not sparing in casting much blame on the affianced wife, whose hard lot they had no means of understanding.

About this time, either in irritation at the long delay, or weakly echoing the opinion of some other person, he wrote to Mary, saying it would be better to break off their engagement at

once rather than thus keep it lingering on for years. Perhaps he said more than he intended, exaggerating his own suffering to excuse the cruelty of the words he wrote.

When he had sent off the letter, if any reaction took place, he pacified his outraged tenderness by saying it would determine her to act independently of her father: that this was really all he wanted, and that it was the wisest step he could have taken.

How cruel that letter was he had no idea, or surely it had never been written, for he was not a false or a hard-hearted man. He was naturally of a noble and true nature, and this was the first step towards a long sorrow.

How she felt the letter I will not attempt to say. Yet it did not come to her with an utter surprise. Something of this sort she had dreaded for some time, though she would have died rather than have accused him of it; but her keenly perceptive affection had felt an altering tone in his letters.

The answer was written as if with her life's blood; that such being the case, and she herself seeing for the present no change in her prospects, she must submit. Not a word did she say of the agony of thus wrenching, as it were, heart from heart. If he did not feel it, she would suffer in silence. She returned him, therefore, the ring which she had worn as his affianced wife for now nearly seven years.

She wrote very meekly and very sorrowfully. There was neither reproach nor recrimination in the letter. It was the expression simply of a submissive spirit bowed between two crushing burdens—burdens it seemed far beyond her strength to bear. She thought that he must know this as well as she did, therefore she did not speak of it. If he knew it, that was enough; if not, it was too late now to tell him. She merely said, God's will be done, and gave him back his freedom.

The worst of a letter is, that it speaks, but imperfectly the spirit of the writers if he or she to whom it is addressed be not in harmony with the writer. So was it now. Selwyn, who had by this time persuaded himself that Mary would move heaven and earth rather than give him up, felt at once piqued and offended by her curt and submissive reply. The unresisting spirit of a broken heart, which was expressed in every line of the letter, was interpreted by his mortified pride as the revelation of the natural coldness of a character which he had fatally mistaken; and



Drawn by J. Watson.

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without taking time to deliberate, he returned, not only the ring which he, too, had received, but also her letters, accompanied with one from him, saying that the blame of this step, if blame there were, must now rest entirely with her; for she having returned his betrothal ring, had virtually first broken the engagement, and thus proved her affection to be less strong than he had flattered himself for so many years that it was.

Some people have the knack, when they know their cause to be weak, of throwing others in the wrong. It is a convenient shield, even against self-accusation. I am ashamed to say that this was now the case with the rector of Combe-bury. He was so utterly dissatisfied with himself, that it was a comfort to stand behind this shield. But there cannot be any greater cowardice.

I know not how Mary bore this terrible blow; neither did she herself know. At first she was so stunned, as it were, that she could not believe it. She thought it was only an outbreak of disappointment and anger, and that soon another letter of conciliation would come. Some of my readers may despise her for being ready to forgive him. I cannot help it; for assuredly she would have forgiven him even more than this. She acknowledged even now the long and cruel trial to which his faith and his love had been subjected; and still believing in the nobility of his nature, she hoped and hoped still that this would triumph, and that he would ask for forgiveness and reconciliation.

But no such letter came.

It was impossible but that this terrible shipwreck of a life's hope should tell upon her countenance if not upon her health; and even the dulled senses of her father interpreted rather than demanded the cause. She confessed to him the simple truth, that their long engagement was at an end. The intelligence had a strange effect upon the old man. It was one of those convulsions of the whole being which at once rouses the dormant faculties as the drunkard is sobered by a sudden shock.

At once the selfish old man comprehended his own selfishness, wept and bewailed the sorrow of his daughter, and would have written to his lost son-in-law to call him back; would have made any sacrifice now that it was too late, and then sank into a state of total imbecility, which had but one alleviation, that it freed her from the violent outbreaks alike of his anger or grief.

But I must do the rector of Combe-bury the justice to say that he was greatly cut up by the turn which his affairs had taken; and though too proud to make confidants of any of his present friends, it was soon known to all that his marriage was at an end, and that it was necessarily a great distress to him. Everybody, therefore, was more kind than ever, though no one ventured to speak on the subject.

He now passed more of his time than ever at the hall, and Mr. Yorke, himself a fine scholar and extensive traveller, greatly enjoyed his society, and did everything in his power to make his time pass agreeably. So, again, twelve months passed. Winter came, and a strange and terrible event occurred, which put every other thought out of people's minds. Mr. Yorke was suddenly killed whilst hunting, and the rector was now called upon to participate in the grief of others. The whole parish mourned as one man, for Mr. Yorke was universally respected and beloved. His daughter stood suddenly alone in the world, the possessor of a large fortune; and though she had innumerable friends and many connections, she looked up to the rector, her father's friend, for counsel and support in preference to all others.

But we will not linger on this part of the story. Lawyers, and executors, and relations there were plenty, and people ready on all hands to be friends to the heiress. But she turned from them all; turned from her nearest relatives, and asked consolation only from the favourite companion of her father.

It was impossible for him to mistake his position. She was one to love, very gentle, very trusting, and she had given all her young affections to him. Was it strange, then, that in twelve months he married her?—that he purposely inquired no further after the unhappy people at Cherrington; made it his duty to forget the past in the present, and settled himself down very comfortably and very splendidly at the hall, taking, according to the provisions of the will, the name of Yorke, in addition to his own?

CHAPTER II.

Let me now pass ten years.

I beg pardon for attempting to interest my readers in such middle-aged people as my hero and heroine are by this time. But I cannot help it; and I must furthermore request them to accompany me, for the remainder of the story,

to the fine old city of Oldminster, the towers and spires of whose ancient cathedral rise above the town, and are seen for miles around.

On the warm south side of the minster lies the spacious close, and under the shadowiness of its stately trees, rivalling in grandeur the cathedral itself, stand the magnificent houses of canons, and prebendaries, and other dignitaries of the church, not to mention the bishop's palace, which, however, is more distant. Very grand and stately is all this; those old, handsome, dark-red brick houses, with their well-cut stone quoins and window-heads; the cloisters and courts with their fountains, and the gardens with their lawns and flower-borders, and their old walls covered with exquisite creepers, and broad-leaved fig-trees. Yes, truly, it is a beautiful and stately place; and they who live there seem to be privileged people.

The Rev. John Selwyn Yorke is one of the canons of Oldminster, and is resident here two or three months in the year; and though considered an unsocial man, of very peculiar habits, and not very much liked by his clerical brethren, yet is far too important a man, both as regards character and worldly position, not to be allowed freely to follow his own course, and to rank as one of the magnates of the place.

Ten years, as I have already said, have passed since the young, trusting, and loving wife has also passed away. She left him a widower after the birth of her first child, a little daughter, whom he called Clarice, after her; and very deeply did he mourn for the fair young creature thus suddenly cut off, who lived long enough to endow him with worldly wealth, and to leave him a little image of herself, and then smiling sweetly, went to join her father in the world of spirits.

It was a grief not lightly to be forgotten; and all the more so, as he could not dispossess his mind of the belief that he was thus bereft in punishment of the lightness with which he had broken his former vows.

He roused himself, however, to his duties, not only as a clergyman, but as the steward of that large property which he now held in trust for his infant daughter. And so the years passed. A good man can hardly be very unhappy, however much the griefs and trials of the world may press upon him, because he knows that all things are in the hands of a supreme and all-wise Ruler; that his beloved ones, if taken

from him, are removed but for a time, and that only as loadstones, to attract him to the higher life to which they have been advanced. The only thing that can make such a man unhappy is the reproach of his conscience; any sense of past weakness or wrong-doing, any unkindness, ingratitude, or injury towards those who have loved and trusted or benefited him, will mar for him the richest lot of earthly fortune. So was it now with Canon Yorke; so had it been with him for years.

No sooner was the first terrible shock and poignancy of grief for the sudden death of his young wife some little abated, than the remembrance of Mary Burnside awoke in his soul with the anguish of which I have spoken. It was the Nemesis which never fails either in this life or the next; and happy for those with whom it is the former. He thought of her not with any reference then to a second marriage, but merely that he must atone to her for the past.

And what, in the mean time, has become of Mary? Her father died before Selwyn had married the young heiress. She herself was but slenderly provided for. The rector, who had long been waiting for her father's place, took possession immediately on his demise; the old furniture was sold, and with about a thousand pounds, the proceeds of the sale and the whole of her father's savings, she did what most young women in her situation would have done, she took a situation as governess. But though she was a remarkably fine musician, and possessed of more than the usual female accomplishments and knowledge, yet not having been trained to this life of hard submission, her health threatened to break down under it. Two or three years, and as many changes, satisfied her, therefore, that she must seek some other mode of life. Whilst, however, she was pondering in deep anxiety as to where was the niche in the world which she was fitted to fill, and laying before God her troubles and her anxieties, she received a letter from her one dear female friend, then the wife of a modern apostle, a devoted missionary in South Africa, inviting her to come out to them, and to share their home, and if not their toils, yet to receive their sympathy and love.

This came to her like a voice from heaven, and to Africa she went. Their sympathy and their love was as a balm to her soul, and she willingly and joyfully entered as a labourer with them in this vineyard of Christian service.

How good she was, and how nobly she

acted her part in that terrible climate, amidst all the hardships and privations of missionary life, I need not tell. Enough that she came as an angel both to the white and the black people, and such a peace and even joy flowed into her heart as can be born only of the entirest fulfilment of duty and the love of those amongst whom we are placed.

There is only one ending to missionary life in Africa, and Mary's friends formed no exception to the rule. She saw the two labourers, husband and wife, laid side by side under a palm-tree in the small but crowded burial-ground which surrounded their little church, and then, already suffering in health, she returned to England with the one child of its apostolic parents, which she adopted as her own, determined thenceforth to live and labour for it, knowing that God would bless her, and leaving all the rest to him.

This little Anglo-African child, a girl, Lisette by name, hardly felt the loss of her parents in the love and care of her adopted mother. The child called her aunt, but to her she was as a daughter. In returning to England, Mary very naturally sought out the only relative which the little Lisette possessed in this country, a blind old lady, a Mrs. Verity. This again brings us to Oldminster and the cathedral close.

On the side of the close opposite to the cathedral stands a row of thirteen houses with their long line of flower-borders and smoothly-shaven lawn in front. These are houses built for the widows and daughters of decayed clergymen, enviable abodes of elegance and peace amidst all that is kindred to the heart and soothing to declining life. Merciful homes of good women.

In the centre house of these thirteen, therefore, lives blind old Mrs. Verity, and here she has resided for many years. Everybody knows and loves her. I wish it were only possible to give an idea of the noble patience with which she has borne all her life's sorrows, her blindness, and now her solitary old age! Yet it is not often solitary after all, for she is sure to have some young orphan lady or poor governess out of place with her, for companionship is one of the merciful provisions of this beautiful institution; and now for the last three months she has had our dear Mary Burnside with her and the little Anglo-African Lisette.

The large residence of Canon Yorke was just opposite the thirteen small houses of which I have spoken, consequently the close lay between them.

The canon was not very rigid in the

performance of his clerical duties, either at Oldminster or Combe-bury. At the latter place he had an excellent married curate residing with his family in the parsonage, whilst he himself occupied the hall. He appeared to people generally to travel a great deal; but his journeys were rather eccentric; sometimes to a great distance, again only to a neighbouring town or county. He generally set out in great haste, and appeared out of spirits when he returned, as though disappointed.

The truth was that he had been seeking now for a long time for the daughter of the former rector of Cherrington. It was extraordinary how she had become lost to everybody. This always seeking and never finding, seemed to deepen the interest of the quest. The truth was, that the longer he lived the more impossible he found it to forget his first affianced wife. The older he grew, and more earnest became his sense of the duties and responsibilities of life, the more he felt the necessity of her as a companion and counsellor. The care and responsibility of his young daughter made him still more urgent to find her. He never loved her, even in the young buoyancy of their first betrothal, as now, and he had laid it upon himself as a sacred duty before God, to find her, and to atone to her for the lightness with which he had broken his early vows.

If there were ever a nobly true and conscientious heart it was that of Canon Yorke, now after the experience and discipline of the ten last years.

He is considered, as I have said, a very peculiar man by the Oldminster people; he is not social either with his ecclesiastical brethren or their families, therefore they talk all the more about him. His little daughter is always with him, whether he is at Combe-bury or Oldminster. If he were not so reserved, somebody or other would advise him to marry again, or to take some middle-aged, discreet gentlewoman into his family, to have the care of the young Clarice. But nobody ventures upon this, and the young lady is left to the loving and not injudicious care of Bethell, the faithful attendant of her mother, and now her most devoted humble friend and even teacher. She was a wild, little independent creature, and, having a dominant spirit, had her own way in everything. I believe her father never contradicted her nor disappointed her in her life, and very fortunate it was that between Bethell and him she was not completely spoiled. As it was, her wilfulness only made her the more piquant and amusing.

Whether her father or Bethell taught her to read was never known; but she now not only read but knew a great deal more than most children of her age. She was, in short, remarkably observant and quick, and learned nobody knew how.

Her father's house was not a very cheerful one; the furniture was old, and the rooms he inhabited were lined with books, which, though valuable, were very dingy. It was one of those houses in which the want of a pervading female taste is very evident, and in which is never found cheerful female society; though the young Clarice and her faithful old Bethell were anything but dull there.

If I wanted to find a contrast to this large gloomy house, I should just walk across the Minster-close to the centre house of the thirteen. Small it was, and calculated only for a small income; but surely never was there such a cheerful, happy home, yet only a blind old widow, our Mary Burnside, and her little Anglo-African orphan were its inmates. All, however, was bright and cheerful and heart-enlivening, both within and around, simply because they trusted in God and loved one another.

The little Anglo-African orphan, a gentle, thoughtful child, whose sallow complexion told of her foreign birth, soon attracted the attention of the lively Clarice as, on the day after her arrival at Oldminster, she walked into the gardens of the close attended by Bethell. Clarice was a perfect contrast to her father in regard to her social proclivities. Nothing was easier or pleasanter to her than to make acquaintance; and taking a fancy to the solitary little Lisette, very soon made her her daily associate. Bethell sat on one of the seats,—if it had been warm weather she would have brought her work with her,—or walked about whilst the little girls amused themselves together. Clarice lorded it over her companion, and noticing her sallow complexion, made her tell of her life in Africa, which the young heiress thought very interesting. In two days Clarice and Lisette were dear friends. It is very easy for little girls to become such; and as the weather was somewhat cold, Clarice invited herself into Lisette's home, to the steps of which Bethell followed her, and then was invited in. There could be no harm in her young charge going there, Bethell knew very well, for everybody esteemed old Mrs. Verity.

Clarice was delighted with the cheerful little home of her friend, it was so fresh and fragrant; there were so many beautiful flowers about it, and the blind

old lady sat at her knitting with her fair complexion and silver hair and eyes that did not look at all blind, dressed in beautiful grey silk—not diurnal mourning—quite a beautiful old lady! And as to Lisette's aunt,—Clarice looked at her again and again, she was so very attractive to her, so sweet and gentle, so elegant and winning in her manners—then, kissed her of her own accord, and asked her if she might call her 'aunt' as Lisette did.

'Yes,' said Lisette, as if answering for her aunt, 'she shall be your aunt and you and I then can be sisters.'

Clarice threw her arms round Mary's neck, without waiting for any reply from her and again kissed her, saying, 'I love you! you shall be my aunt, and I'll bring papa to see you some day!'

CHAPTER III.

'Papa,' said little Clarice one evening, after she had been several times to Mrs. Verity's, 'I've got an aunt, and you must love her very much—I wish she was my mamma though!'

'Nonsense, child! who has put such thoughts into your head? not Bethell, I hope,' said the canon, almost angrily.

'I heard Mrs. Carsharilton and Canon Shaw saying that you should give me a new mamma,' replied Clarice, 'and I should like Lisette's aunt.'

'What's Lisette's aunt like?' asked he, for he had already seen Lisette; 'is she a South African, too?'

'She's so pretty, papa, only I don't think she is young; but I love her very much; and that is such a nice old blind lady! and they have such pretty rooms, and Lisette's aunt sings beautifully, and Lisette can play so well, and she is half a year younger than I am; I think I should learn. Should I not, papa? And Lisette's aunt likes me to go there, and so does Mrs. Verity, and she is her great-aunt, you know.'

The canon made no objection to his little daughter going to see Lisette's aunt, the great-niece of Mrs. Verity as he supposed her to be; indeed he was very well pleased with the acquaintance, thinking that this lady might teach her music, if not become her governess whilst he was in residence; for it was all in order that a lady residing with Mrs. Verity should be of the accomplished governess class. He thought, therefore, that some day before long he would go with Clarice and thank this lady and Mrs. Verity for their kindness to his little daughter, and judge whether it would be desirable and suitable to

propose the teaching. He had quite forgotten by this time all that Clarice had said about the new mamma, and soon, I am sorry to say, the whole subject slipped from his mind.

And he must be excused for this heedlessness, because another subject was just now uppermost. He received information from a person whom he had employed to inquire after the 'daughter of the former rector of Cherrington,' that she was living in the far-west of Ireland as companion with a Mrs. O'Halloran Burke. He remembered that Mary's mother had distant relations or connections in Ireland, and now he thought that probably he might at last be in the right track. It was the second week in December, and the winter had set in very severely. But that was of no consequence. He had taken winter journeys before now for the same object, and he was not easily to be turned back.

He had promised his little daughter a very happy Christmas that year. Now, therefore, he left orders with Bethell and his housekeeper that all was to be prepared just the same as if he were at home, he hoping to return, though it might be only in time for the merry-making. However, all the usual poor people were to be provided for, as well as numerous humble friends, to whom he made his Clarice a benefactress every year.

The little girl and her father were talking it over the evening before he set out.

'And I must have some nice present for Lisette and her aunt—my aunt, you know, father dear, and for that nice old Mrs. Verity. I wish, papa you'd give me for Lisette's aunt a very beautiful Church Service, one bound in ivory, quite lovely, because hers is such an old one. I saw her going out with it one morning, and I made such a mistake, and said, "Oh, what a shabby old book!" It was very rude, you know, papa, but I couldn't help it, because it was so old; and she said, "My dear, I value this book very much; it was given me by a friend I once had," and she looked so sorry, I think he must be dead; perhaps it was her father, so I should like you to give a beautiful Church Service.'

Her father made no reply, for all at once he remembered that he had given a Church Service in years long past—indeed as his first gift—to Mary Burnside, and a strange questioning came to his mind: was it possible that she had kept it like this young lady?

'Now, did you hear me, papa? de-

manded the impatient little girl, as her father gave her no reply. 'I said I wanted you to give Lisette's aunt a beautiful Church Service, like mine, that was dear mamma's—in ivory.'

'Very well, my dear, I've no objection; you can get one for her. I'll speak to Bethell about it, or perhaps Mrs. Carshalton would do better.'

'No, I won't have Mrs. Carshalton,' said Clarice, petulantly; 'dear old Bethell can do it. And I shall get something very nice for Lisette and for Mrs. Verity, only I wonder what it should be; but I can ask Lisette's aunt, can't I, papa?'

'Well, my dear, I dare say I shall be back in time,' replied her father, 'then we'll see about these things.'

'I shan't wait for that,' said Clarice. 'You tell Bethell that I may spend ten pounds for my friends, then she and I shall manage. I know exactly how to buy things.'

'Very well, I'll speak to Bethell,' said the indulgent canon, kissing his little daughter, and she, from old experience, knew that she should have her own way.

But it must not be supposed all this time that Mary was unaware who was the father of the young Lisette's friend. She knew it, and she felt it a most peculiar and difficult position for her to be placed in. The very day after he first came she saw him crossing the close, and the sight of him sent, as it were, all her life from her heart. It was well for her that her old companion was sightless, else the death-like countenance must have alarmed her.

That same day, too, one of the old neighbour ladies came in, as she often did, to gossip, for it seemed only friendly to many of them to bring all the news to the blind Mrs. Verity.

'And so Canon Yorke is come,' she said. 'He read prayers yesterday. I like his reading vastly; but how ill he looks!'

Mary was sewing; she moved her chair somewhat behind the visitor, and nerved herself to hear whatever might be said.

'He is a very handsome man, though! But they say he will never get over his wife's death, and yet that must be seven or eight years ago. I saw Bethell coming out of the Carshaltons' this morning, and stopped to ask after little Miss Yorke. What a respectable, well-behaved woman that Bethell is! and yet I think he ought to have a governess for the child. They tell me she is quite a beauty, like her mother, I suppose. But it is a queer way in which he is

bringing her up. I wish I could persuade him to engage Anna Jones. Poor Anna! she has been so unfortunate since she left Lord Hightower's. I should be so glad to get her in with Canon Yorke; he is so liberal and so kind to everybody about him. Only I wonder he does not see that the child ought to have a governess. But don't let me keep the fire from you, Miss Burnside,' said the visitor, moving her chair aside.

'Come in towards the fire, my dear,' said Mrs. Verity. 'I don't think you are well this evening, my love. I can always tell when anything's amiss,' continued she. 'I don't know how it is, but it is something in the atmosphere that is about a person, I think. But it is wonderful how I can feel any trouble that is in their minds. You had not any letter that troubled you this morning, my dear, had you?'

Mary was quite calm: she said that she had neither received any letter, nor yet was she ill; but she preferred sitting by the window on account of the light.

The visitor then spoke of the approaching Christmas, and the boys who would be home from Eton and Harrow, and then returned to Canon Yorke, who was such a leading man, both here and at Combe-bury, that he was to dine with the bishop that day; that he had a very fine income, and did a great deal of good; that it was a happy day for the curate when he first went to Combe-bury, for all the income of the living was now his, and he had a large family; that it was a beautiful parsonage-house, and the hall was a splendid place. But did not Mrs. Verity think it would be much better if he married again? She herself wondered he didn't, for he was a handsome man, and could not be much above forty, if that. She thought if he were married he would settle down. But they said he was always restless. She supposed it was for grief of the loss of his wife. She had a friend who was quite intimate with the curate's wife at Combe-bury, and she said he often set off at an hour's notice. He went to the most unheard-of places. If he went to the Holy Land nobody would wonder, because that was right for a clergyman; but he went to the Society Islands, to Nova Scotia, or somewhere else where they have missionaries. It was very strange! But had Mrs. Verity ever heard some story about his having been so cruelly jilted by a lady that he was once engaged to?

'Mary, I'm sure something's amiss

with you,' interrupted Mrs. Verity. 'I feel it again, just as I did yesterday.'

The visitor suddenly turned round in her chair. Mary quickly drew down the blind, said it was now too dark to work, and she would send in candles.

'Ring, my dear,' said blind Mrs. Verity, 'and let Susan bring them.'

But Mary was out of the room, and the visitor finding that the evening was fast closing in, rose to take her leave, for she had two other calls to make before tea-time; and now she had to tell how queer and fanciful was Mrs. Verity, and how she worried poor Miss Burnside with her fancies, till she was fairly driven out of the room.

Mary knew that, sooner or later, she and Canon Yorke must meet, but she resolved not to hurry the time, which, come when it might, must be a severe trial to her. Still she was thankful that now it would not take her by surprise. She trusted all to God, as she had hitherto done in her former sorrows and trials, knowing that strength would be given to her. As regarded his feelings towards her, she believed them to be those of indifference. Perhaps, indeed, he would purposely shun her, from some sense of former unkindness and wrong-doing. As to herself, whatever his feelings might be, I must confess that she trembled for her own peace of mind, and walked about as if in an armour of prayer for help and strength, knowing herself to be only a weak woman, to whom forgiveness was more easy than resentment, and love infinitely more natural than hatred.

How strange, then, it seemed, when the very next day her own innocent Lisette was seized upon by the lively Clarice, who, perhaps acting under the power of the Supreme Will, was winding a thread, as it were, round herself, that she might be drawn into Mary's sphere.

It was with a deep but silent emotion that she received the little girl's voluntary affection, and a new and unspeakable interest came into each passing day. Yet never, in all her trials, had she been so much afraid of herself as she was now. She felt something like the doomed ship which sees itself drawn into the Maelstrom. She wished to resist, yet she could not, and the young Clarice, with all her candour and self-assertion, spoke to her of her father with that doting affection and pride with which she regarded him, and which, perhaps, with somewhat of an instinctive sense, she perceived to be agreeable to the gentle lady.

And now came the day on which Canon Yorke left home on his journey to Ireland, and Clarice, attended by Bethell, carried a note from her father addressed to Miss Verity.

'Papa has made a mistake in your name; he thinks you are Mrs. Verity's daughter, I dare say,' said the young Clarice, 'will you please to excuse it; for he's gone to Ireland, you know?'

Mary was reading the note, in that familiar handwriting, familiar yet somewhat different, from the inevitable change which steals into the handwriting, as into the countenance, from the sorrows and discipline of life.

It was a very friendly note, written as to the yet unknown friend of his child, and addressed equally to Mrs. Verity; nevertheless he thanked Mary individually for the pleasure which she had afforded to his little daughter by her kindness and attention, and apologized for not having made the acknowledgment in person. But he was suddenly called from home; and on his return, which would be probably before Christmas, he would have that pleasure. In the mean time he begged to bespeak her continued kindness to the child.

Mary placed the note amongst her everyday things, for as yet how could she say but this might end painfully for her? Canon Yorke only desired to call on her as on the casual acquaintance of his little girl. If he had known who she really was would he not have fled from Oldminster back to Combe-bury, or have forbidden the child again to see her? She could not tell. His conduct had been so cruelly inexplicable before, that probably it was merely irrational to expect anything different now.

She was sorely perplexed. Clarice, however, almost lived with them. Bethell brought her work and stayed too, going home only for her meals, as she thought right. The two little girls took their lessons together; and Clarice, who had never had any regular instruction before, and who had revolted at the idea of a governess, found that learning from this sweet and gentle aunt was better even than being taught by her father. Nothing, therefore, could be happier, or have appeared more judicious in the eyes of the twelve ladies and all their gossips, whether wives or sisters of canon and prebendaries, or any other functionaries of the church, high or low. The canon at last had done wisely, only that the gossip we have seen deplored that there was now, she feared, no chance

for Anna Jones, as Miss Burnside had certainly sweet manners, and had learned to teach amongst the black Caffirs, which would just suit Canon Yorke.

From Ireland the canon wrote that he should probably have somewhat to extend his journey, and therefore should scarcely return home before Christmas Eve, at which time his dear Clarice might certainly expect him. He also inclosed a line for Bethell, giving her almost *carte blanche* with respect to the presents which were to be purchased, and Clarice might, as far as possible, consult with Miss Verity on the subject.

Christmas preparations, therefore, went on cheerily. Many little preparations were making at blind old Mrs. Verity's for the small Christmas entertainment there, and very much more ample were making in the great kitchen of Canon Yorke, whose housekeeper and cook knew how large was the master's heart, and what a numerous company would be entertained at his table, besides the poor families whom he regaled at their several houses on that day.

Bethell and Clarice also had their secrets, and so had Lisette's aunt and Clarice, and everybody was delightfully mysterious, as is proper on such occasions. Blind Mrs. Verity herself had her secrets; she, with her surpassing skill in knitting, was making two warm jackets of the softest, warmest wool, of the loveliest blue, for the two little girls, and these, of course, only came out in their absence. She was also knitting a pair of beautiful violet cuffs for Canon Yorke, but these, of course, his little daughter saw in progress.

For her father, Clarice, who had never condescended to touch a needle before, made, under Mary's instruction, a very pretty bookmark, worked with beads. Mary herself ventured to do nothing for him. She had worked in those five happy years at Cherrington, and in the two anxious ones at Combe-bury, before the terrible severance came, too many things, too faithfully, and too lovingly, to do anything for him now, when all seemed in such strange perplexity, and another crisis assuredly was at hand.

She kept asking herself what was the right mode of conduct for her; and old Mrs. Verity had again the sense of something unusual agitating her companion's mind.

'I don't ask you to tell me what it is,' she said, as they sat together alone on the Christmas Eve, after their little

entertainment, for Lisette and their one little maid was over, and at the very time when Mary knew that if Canon Yorke was returned, as they expected, he must have received the note which she had sent to meet him that day.

'I know that something agitates and distresses you. But, my dear, I hope you are not going to leave me,' added the blind woman, sorrowfully.

Mary burst into tears; her heart was so full, her anxiety so great, that tears were a relief. Then she told her aged friend how it was; told her everything—for as yet she knew nothing but of her connection with the African missionary and his wife.

'I think I have come to see what is right for me to do, and I have done it,' said she; 'but now the reaction comes, and I am very weak.'

'I have written to Canon Yorke,' she continued; 'I sent the note to-day before Clarice and Bethell left, that he might have it as soon as he returned. I told him who I was, wishing to spare him the surprise, perhaps the unpleasant surprise and pain of finding in the supposed Miss Verity no other than Mary Burnside.'

'There is nothing more to be done, my dear,' returned the blind lady, 'but to carry all your anxiety to God. I am

not anxious about it myself. I don't feel any anxiety, strange to say. There is but one way, my dear, in all our sorrows and difficulties—take them all to God, and He is sure to bring them right.'

At that moment there was such a loud ring at Mrs. Verity's door, that the neighbours, right and left, heard it. Both Mary and Mrs. Verity started, and the little servant jumped up from admiring her pretty Christmas presents, with her heart in her throat, as she said, for she thought the house was on fire.

It was Canon Selwyn Yorke, looking almost beside himself. It was an excellent thing that it was dark, else all the old ladies in the close would have been at their windows to see him rushing along as if he were suddenly demented.

And now he was in the little parlour, and Mary—really and truly!—Mary was in his arms. Had she fainted? No, nothing of the sort. But very pale she was, and he was taking a great liberty, the most astonishing liberty, he was kissing her lips and forehead. She made no resistance; she only looked into his face; and all the love of all those years seemed expressed in that long, silent glance.

CHRISTMAS IN PARIS.

IT is Christmas morning; clear, crisp, seasonable; in a great foreign capital—in Paris. For the last few days some country people have been bringing round holly in carts, cunning to find out the weak points of us English. The holly is not plentiful, and is very dear; still, it is refreshing to rest the eye on the red-berried boughs. My morning letters, my Christmas letters, are brought in. The *concierge*, how amiable is his manner and beaming his countenance, ready to rush off to the furthestmost *barrier* for Monsieur! The rascal is frequently sullen, and, notwithstanding what we hear about French sobriety, invariably drunk; but he has astonished us of late by being, as the Irishman said, repeatedly sober. He is not up to the British invention of the Christmas-box; but he is naturally sanguine, like the whole of his fraternity, for a friendly memorial on the *jour d'an*. My letters abound with kindly Christmas wishes from relative and friend, and carry back

my thoughts to jovial Christmas in London squares, and country personages, and lonely manor-houses. This Christmas, however, I break new ground—I am accumulating new Christmas experiences. I am glad at heart. My letters have put me in good humour. Above all, Christmas Day itself puts me in good humour. If there is so often an undertone of sadness in religion, on Christmas Day there seems only one high note of rejoicing. I trust we have all a share in that best and truest joy of all, when we realize how the day inaugurates these modern centuries and years of redemption.

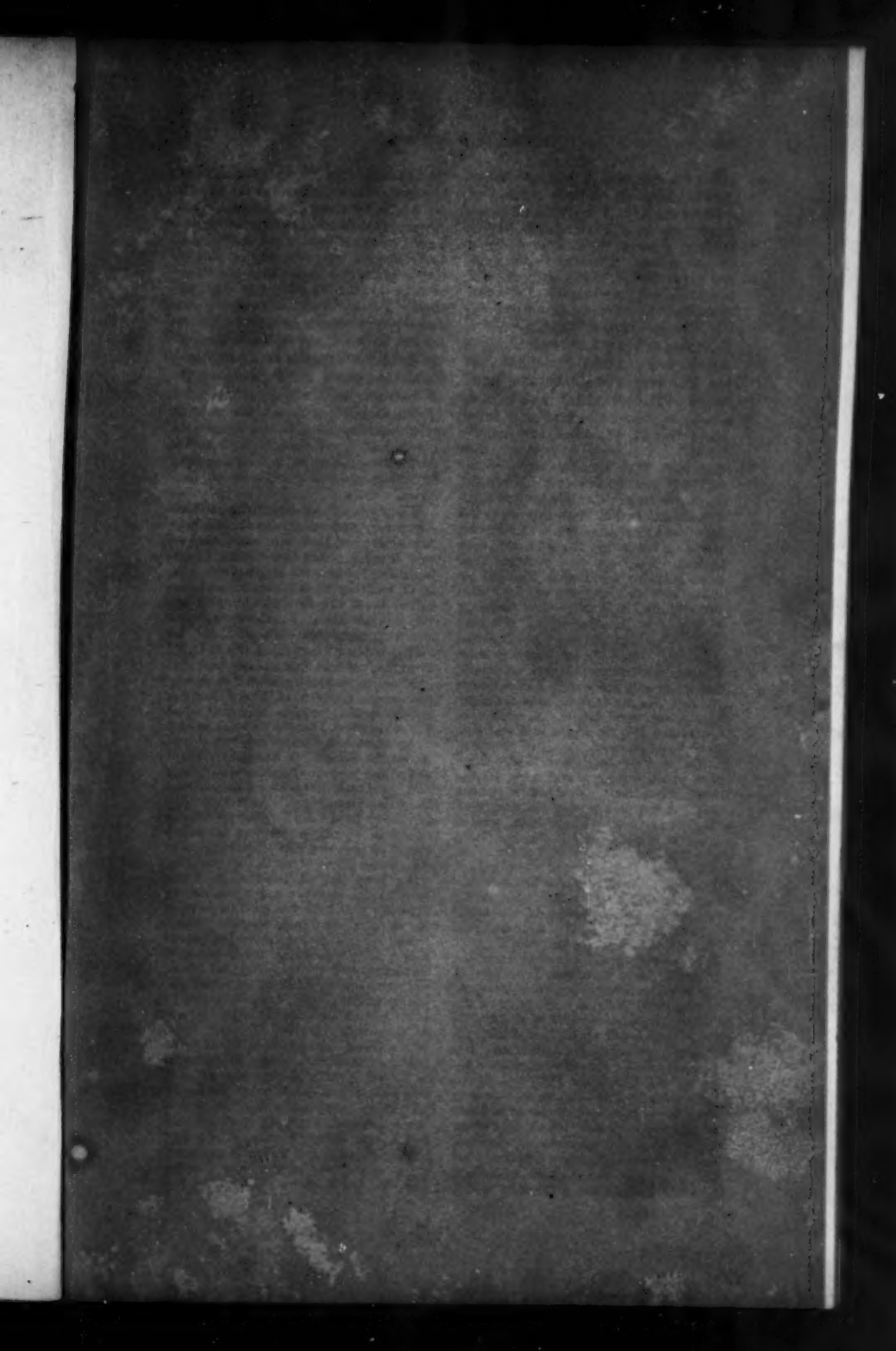
Presently I take my walks abroad. The brilliant winter sunshine is flooding the Champs Elysées, sparkling on the fountains, and reflected back from the gilded spear-heads of the garden-gates of the Tuileries. It is a pity these French have no rejoicing Christmas chimes, and know so very little about holly-tree and mistletoe. To them it is

only a fête day, though perhaps better observed than an ordinary Sunday or ordinary fête day. You do not often see many men in a Paris church, but I think you see more than usual on a Christmas Day. The music is often exceedingly good,—bright and cheerful music, as befits the bright and cheerful thoughts of Christmas. In all probability it is some of Palestrina's music—that Palestrina to whom the Church of Rome is under so deep a debt of gratitude. But you will everywhere miss the grand music of the 'Messiah.' Indeed, it is astonishing how little the French know about Handel, or indeed any oratorio music. Let it be said, however, that they have their Christmas music, and that it is good of the kind. Moreover, an Englishman—if, indeed, he is a genuine unaffected Briton—may enjoy the luxury of a Christmas fog. The French would be very angry at such a statement as this. They say that in Paris they never have fog, and that in England we never have anything else but fog. But you will find in Paris a Christmas fog in the early morning, which you may carve almost as easily as a Christmas pudding. Some French families have English fashions and English traditions, and these go some way to individualize the day. So the Parisian side of Christmas is not very much. Nevertheless, Christmas Day in Paris is a real fact, patent and pleasant.

For in Paris—as where not?—there is a great, strong, jovial race settled down, whose most potent article of faith and practice is the due observance of Christmas time. They have settled down in Paris, as elsewhere, and have seized upon the very best parts of it, conquering by reason of their golden weapons. 'Look at those English robbers,' remarked a German the other day, outspreading the map of the world—'look how they have seized the best and richest spots all the world over.' It is perfectly true; I confess it, rather proudly. And what they have done in the world at large, they have also done in this world of Paris, encamping on the loftiest, prettiest, healthiest grounds of the region round about. And this red-cheeked, guffawing, strong-armed, impetuous race do strongly congregate together on Christmas Day, and shake each other by the hand, and poke each other in the ribs, and invite each other to sumptuous feasts, where they draw many corks, and make many speeches, and play with their many children—not the pale brace or so which constitute what the French are pleased to call a

family—and, generally speaking, eat and drink almost as much as the French do. And in the wake of the Anglo-Saxon-Norman race come our offspring or offshoots, the Yankees. They incline, not to the French, but to the English view of the question, and keep Christmas illustratively as the English have taught them. For the Parisian Yankees, who number very largely, though they have not lost the gauntness of the figure and the hunger of the eye, have greatly modified these characteristics, and, in spite of disastrous wars and disastrous rates of exchange, enjoy themselves in what even these Republicans and Democrats would call royal fashion, and which proves them not so much the cousins as the brothers and compeers of ourselves.

There are no poor Americans in Paris—you very seldom find anywhere a poor American; but there are abundance of poor English. But the British Charitable Fund comes out in great strength, as is befitting at this season, and the collections at the English churches are very considerable. Furthermore, there is a very numerous class in Paris, far indeed beyond the range of the B. C. F., to whom, nevertheless, all the love and kindness of the season would be deeply necessary. Quite a cloud of English governesses is evermore alighting upon French shores. You see that the British matron demands that her children should be taught French as learned in Paris, and so the poor young things, so pretty and good and helpless, come over here to qualify themselves. As a rule, they have very hard lines. They go into as cheap a boarding-house or boarding-school as they can find. That vegetable soup, those juiceless meats, that vinegary wine, those fireless hearths, those uncarpeted floors, make sad havoc among the roses that lately bloomed in English air on those English cheeks. Some loving hearts among more prosperous sisters think and plan for these, find them out, and comfort and aid them. Let me describe a scene, of which the kindly agent is gone hence to renew in heaven the anthem of the herald angels of Bethlehem, leaving, I trust, those who walk in her footsteps. It is Christmas morning, and a young English girl is brooding sadly in the *dortoir* of a *pension*. She is thinking of the happy Christmas Days, when the fortunes of her house were yet prosperous and un-fallen; and for the moment it is a very slight consolation that her Paris hardships may enable her to win a better wage for her work by-and-by. To her





Drawn by Emily M. Osborn.]

A CHRISTMAS INCIDENT IN PARIS.

[Page 6.]



Drawn by Emily K. Mason

A FASHIONABLE DRESS OF THE DAY

enters a domestic. A lady wishes to speak to her in the *parloir*. With instinctive, lady-like grace the stranger greets her. She trusts to be pardoned this intrusion; but having learned that a young English lady was staying there, and fearing that she might feel lonely in France on this Christmas Day, she sincerely trusted that she would spend this Christmas Day with herself and her friends. With full and grateful heart the girl assented. The new friend first took her for a good bracing drive in the Bois de Boulogne, then in the Boulevards, by the glittering shops, when she insisted on giving her some presents of the season, and then to warm, well-lighted, well-filled rooms, where the hospitable board was spread with English Christmas cheer, and the generous champagne was quaffed, to whose moderate use all the fair daughters of Eve are innocently addicted. There was no merrier, no holier Christmas in Paris.

But I am taking my Christmas-morning ramble. I think no one ever omits to observe the curious appearances presented by the Boulevards on and about Christmas Day. It is a sort of Feast of Tabernacles. The booths line the pavement and front the shops; the little markets or fairs, so familiar by the barriers of Paris, are brought fully into Paris itself. It is something more picturesque and old-fashioned than you could have imagined that the high-wrought civilization of Paris could display. Pass gently by the blind man, who is led by his dog through the crowded street, yea, and give him the loose sous in your pocket. He is the only beggar recognized and allowed by the laws of France, and a kind of sanctity is attached to him. I have struck into a less-frequented portion of the town, and I vow and declare that here is a marriage party approaching. Marriage at Christmas is certainly a good deed for a good day. Now it is worth while observing where we are and what is being done. Six months ago this open space was a reeking rookery of poor and somewhat dangerous people. The government of our wise Emperor has laid it with the dust. He has made of it another pleasure-ground wherewith to amuse the Parisians. There is some green grass, and an artificial rock, and a tiny cascade, and some trees, and little paths, and a great gate with gilded spear-heads. And here our Christmas wedding-party—let me see, only half a dozen—suddenly pause, and begin to dance very gaily. Nobody joins in, but

nobody thinks it odd, and for my own part I look on kindly and approvingly. They don't dance long, but long enough to make them warm. Presently the little marriage party will go a little farther on, and they will come to another little civic enclosure, and then they will have another little dance. I mentally wish them happiness, and turn into some of the churches, especially the churches of St. Roch and the Madeleine, where the best music is to be heard, and most of my countrymen and countrywomen are to be seen. And then I attend the English service in the English church, Rue de la Madeleine. The Christmas decorations here will surely gladden your eye; they are lavish, and, more than that, they are a work of art. That altar-work of berried holly deserves a record here. I will venture to say that the Christmas work and the Christmas sermon are fully on a par.

You see wherever English people go they construct a little England, as Virgil tells us how the exiles from Ilium found a new Simois and built a mimic Troy. There are various English hosteleries in Paris; and, though their number is very limited, there is room for the good, bad, and indifferent among them. Roast beef and plum-pudding abound; and such is the display of turkeys *aux truffes* in the poulterers' shops, such the enormous predominance and general absorption of oysters, that, so far as the eating and drinking are concerned—which John Bull too often considers the most essential point of the business—it is a solid satisfaction to reflect that every Frenchman must really be keeping Christmas after all. But I am spared, and I trust all other English Christmas wayfarers are spared, the tavern hospitality of Christmas. I only trust that my lines may always be in as pleasant places. And not only may the turkey and champagne be as pleasant, but the host as genial, guests as clever, the women as pretty. Earth has still her evergreens, and the nightly heavens are crowded with stars, thought I to myself as I walked home under their quiet lustre; and, above all, it is at such a season as this that voices of sober joy may best arise from earth to heaven, and voices of consolation and hope steal down from heaven to earth. To him who heartily recognises all this on any shore, Christmas Day will evermore be Christmas Day; not last or least, Christmas Day here, in Paris.

F. A.

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE.

I WILL not sing of the thousands
 Of blossoms that hailed the Spring,
 When Flora wedded the meadows
 With an opal-jewelled ring ;
 When Iris stood in the heavens,
 And to laughter turned the rain ;
 When the tamed sea fondled the headlands,
 And the rocks smiled back on the main.

I sing not the myriad roees
 That tapestried the dawn,
 When the blithe flower-sandalled Summer
 Trod the enamelled lawn ;
 When the sun was lord of the daytime,
 And songs floated out of sight ;
 When the dewdrops nourished the evening,
 And Philomel hushed the night.

I will not sing of the Autumn
 That showed the strength of the root
 Pendent from countless branches,
 All clustered with golden fruit.
 I will not sing of the harvest,
 Nor the wealth of its bounteous yield ;
 Nor the rest that garnered plenty
 Left out on the rifled field.

Ah, no ! By the yule-log sitting,
 Though a moment my glance I cast
 Back on the course of the seasons,
 And praise all the chequered past ;
 Yet chiefly I thank the Winter,
 That in pity gave one reprieve ;
 That, smiting the first-born of beauty,
 Left a rose for this Christmas Eve.

I watched, through the chills of December,
 Its delicate petals form,
 Till I saw it conquer the night-frost,
 And thrive on the daily storm.
 And now that my heart is dancing
 With the crowning joy of the year,
 I witness it gently cherished
 Fair, on the breast of my fair.

Each leaf had its eloquent language
 To say what I pined to say,
 And its painted words to utter
 The prayer that I dared not pray.
 She blushed—and I blessed the omen—
 As I plucked the last pride of the bower ;
 And I knew that her heart accepted
 My own, with the Christmas flower.

To her lips she pressed the token,
 And its hues began to fade—
 So near to the living coral,
 What colour but must grow pale ?



Victorian

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

1864

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE.

I will not sing of the thousands
 Of blossoms that hailed the Spring,
 When Flora wooed the meadows
 With an opal-jewelled ring;
 When Iris danced in the heavens,
 And in laughter turned the rain;
 When the tamed sea wooed the headlands,
 And the rocks smiled back on the main.

I will not sing the verdant trees
 That tapestried the dawn,
 When the blithe flower-mantled Summer
 Trod the enamelled lawn;
 When the sun was lord of the daytime,
 And wings flared out of sight;
 When the dewdrops anointed the evening,
 And Phosphor beamed the night.

I will not sing of the Autumn
 That showed the strength of the root
 Peeking from autumnal branches,
 All coloured with golden fruit.
 I will not sing of the harvest
 When the wattle or the beech-tree plied
 The bar not the golden plenty
 Laid out on the table d'indie.

Alas! the Christmas Eve
 When the snow was on the ground,
 And the stars were in the sky,
 And the wind was in the trees,
 For (sadly I think the women
 That in pity gave our reproves;
 That, smiling the first-born of beauty,
 Left a rose for this Christmas Eve.

I watched, through the shills of December,
 Its delicate petals freeze,
 Till I saw it conquer the night-frost,
 And thrive on the daily snow;
 And now that my heart is dancing
 With the crowding joy of the year,
 I witness it gently re-emerge
 Fair, on the breast of my fair.

How, but had its eloquent language
 To say what I pined to say,
 And no painted words to utter
 The power that I dared not pray,
 She blushed—and I blessed the queen—
 As I plucked the last prize of the flower;
 And I knew that her heart accepted
 My own, with the Christmas flower.

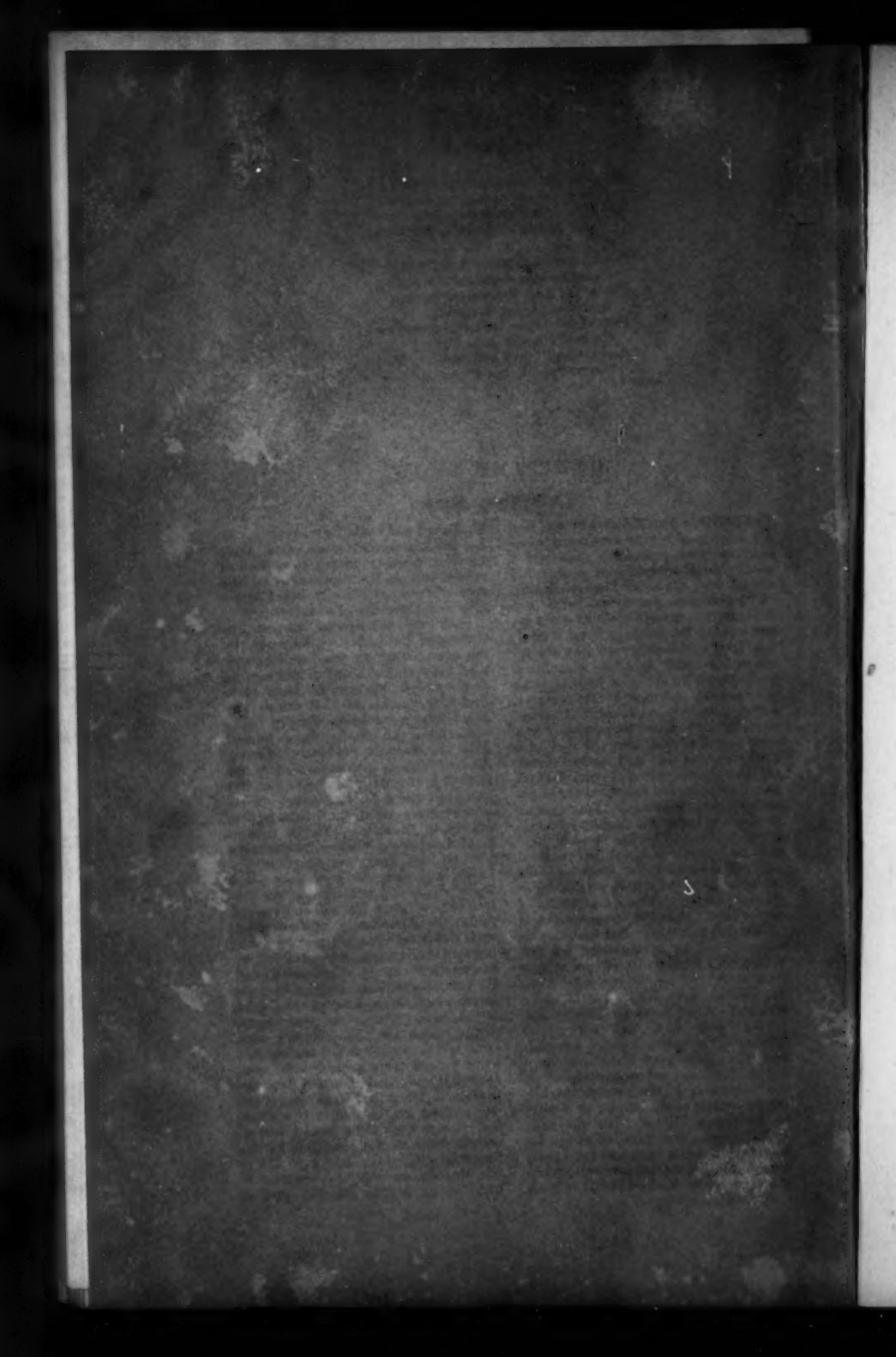
To her lips she pressed the token,
 And its hue began to fade—
 So near to the living coral,
 What colour but must grow pale?



Winterhalter.]

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE.

[Page 49.]



My heart for a moment fluttered"
 Like a fledgling scared in its nest,
 Till the flower regained its brightness
 When laid on the snow of her breast.

Strong from this moment and fearless;
 I laugh at the world and its strife;
 For to her I am dear as her beauty,
 And she is to me as my life.
 Henceforth in the heat of the Summer,
 On her love will mine repose;
 And through every gloom of the Winter
 She will aye be my Christmas Rose.

A. H. G.

OVER THE SNOW.

A Christmas Story.

BEFORE a cheerful fire, in the best kitchen of a snug west-country cottage, sat two persons, a man and a woman, both advanced in years. All around wore an air of homely comfort. Of mere ornament there was little; but the furniture, though plain as could be, and bearing the marks of long service, was good and solid; and its trim arrangement and spotless cleanliness spoke highly for the good housekeeping of its owners. A square of Dutch carpet, bound with crimson braid, was spread upon the stone floor; and a glazed oak bookcase displayed upon its shelves a goodly store of delf and ancient china. On the chimneypiece a cuckoo-clock ticked merrily, and in one corner of the room stood an old-fashioned square piano, on which were piled a considerable number of well-bound books. Two or three old line engravings, mostly of scriptural subjects, decorated the walls, and the lattice window was half hidden by a crimson curtain. The whole aspect of the cottage betokened competence and modest independence. Nor were the inmates belied by appearances, for few among the inhabitants of the village were more universally respected than David and Mary Holt. In the same cottage they had lived for thirty years, paying their way, and asking no favour of any man; and for five-and-twenty of those years David had been parish clerk and schoolmaster, and in the estimation of the younger parishioners, little, if at all, inferior in dignity to the parson himself. His wife, with no less respect, won more affection; for David Holt was a stern and hard man, always just, but seldom generous; while Mary was ever tender-hearted, with a

kind word and smile for everybody. To her the schoolchildren came in all their troubles, whether arising from blow of cricket-ball or the perplexities of the rule of three, and rarely failed to receive some measure of consolation.

Such were the couple who sat, one Christmas Eve not very long ago, by the cosy cottage fireside. A long clay pipe, a real old-fashioned churchwarden, just put aside, lay upon the snow-white deal table, and David Holt was reading aloud from a ponderous Family Bible, while his good wife, her hands crossed upon her knees, sat reverently listening. As befitted their solemn occupation, the faces of both were grave and quiet, but that quiet gravity seemed only to throw into stronger relief the characteristic expression of each;—David, square-headed and square-chested, with massive jaw and chin, heavy over-hanging eyebrows, and deep-set keen grey eyes, hard, proud, and unforgiving, the embodiment of stern self-will and rugged pride; the old woman, gentle and quiet, with downcast eyes, soft grey hair, and pleasant smiling lips, that told of nothing but love and charity. And yet, though the two faces were so unlike, a keen observer might have detected an element of likeness. There are some events (happy those who have known none such) which, coming into a human life, leave behind them a shadow for ever. It needed no second glance at these two persons to know that some such event (some great sin, or shame, or sorrow) had passed over their lives. But as natures differ, so the scars left by the fiery trial differ too. In David Holt's face the shadow bore the impress of humbled pride; in Mary's, that of

wounded affection. The smile on the old woman's lips, the kindly smile that had rested there from youth, and that old age could not wear away, though still sweet, was sad as well; and the kind voice, that had so often spoken courage and cheer to others, had now a tone of weariness and ever-present pain. The rugged nature of David, on the other hand, seemed to have hardened under the rod; the hard features had become harder, the cold grey eye colder and sterner than ever. Even now, while reading the sweet Christmas idyll, the sweet story whose burden is the song of the angels, 'Peace on earth, good will to men,' his harsh voice lost none of its accustomed harshness, but uttered the sacred words defiantly, in tones suited rather to some tale of battle and violence, than to the glad tidings of everlasting peace.

Slowly and steadily, never raising his eyes from the sacred page, David Holt read on; but even above his loud harsh tones could be heard the unmistakable sounds of a storm raging without. The wind howled and roared over the wild west-country moor, straining against the cottage eaves, wrestling with door and casement, and piling heaps of snow high against the lattice-windows. It was a night in which no one, with a home to go to, would willingly have been out of doors; any shelter, even the poorest and roughest, would have been preferable to exposure to that pitiless storm. And yet, out in the cottage garden, under the full fury of the bitter wind and driving snow, a woman stood, bare-headed and motionless, gazing through the lattice with wild, longing, hungry eyes at the homely scene within. After a little while she crept into the porch, but not to seek for shelter. One knock at the door, as though dealt with a feeble or timid hand, was heard; and then, waiting not the result, she came forth again and fled swiftly, her long hair streaming in the wild wind, towards the open moor.

After a moment or two the door opened, the light from within casting a broad bright beam into the outer darkness; and Mary Holt, shading her eyes with her hand, peered forth into the storm. She caught sight of the flying figure, and calling to her husband, the two gazed after it till it disappeared altogether in the darkness. David was the first to re-enter the cottage, saying, as he did so, 'Come in, Missus, come in, will 'ee? It's some foolish prank o' one o' the village wenches.' She thought to fright us, I reckon.' His

wife turned to follow him, but as she did so, stumbled against a bundle lying at her feet. 'She's left some'at behind her, then,' said the old woman, stooping to examine it, when a faint wailing cry was heard, and she started back an instant, then hastily snatching up the bundle, rushed into the cottage. 'Oh Davy, did 'ee ever; it's a child!' As she spoke, she laid her burden on the table, and letting fall the thick woollen cloak in which it was wrapped, disclosed a baby of three or four months old, whose wide open eyes seemed to testify the utmost astonishment as to how he got there. With motherly instinct, the good soul took the child in her arms, pressing it to her bosom with murmurs of endearment. But David's brow was black as night. 'A pretty thing, the shameless jade, to saddle honest folk wi' her love-brat; but I'll find her out, I warrant—ay, that I will, if it costs me twenty pound!'

'Nay, Davy, don't 'ee be too hard on the poor soul. There's never a sin without sorrow; and she must have had a weary sight o' pain and misery before she'd be willing to part with her child.'

'And serve her right, a baggage!' replied her husband. 'If there's law or justice in the parish, I'll have her in the stocks before another week's out.'

'Davy, Davy!' pleaded the good wife. 'Sure you've forgotten that it's Christmas Eve, and the good words you were reading but now. Oh! maister, don't be angry over much to-night.'

David was about to make a stern rejoinder, when his wife caught sight of a small locket of gold and blue enamel, which was hung about the child's neck by a ribbon. With a cry as if she had received a blow, she gasped, 'Oh, David, David, look at this! It's hers, it's Ally's, our own child's!'

A flash of indescribable emotion passed for a moment over David Holt's face, and lip and eyelid quivered. But it was only for a moment, and the stern face hardened again, a shade paler, perhaps, but dark and stern as ever. When he spoke it was slowly and distinctly.

'I don't know of whom you speak; I had a child o' that name once, but she brought shame upon us. Take her who will, she's none o' mine.'

'She is our own flesh and blood, David,' pleaded the old woman, in an agony of tears. 'The Lord made her that, and bitter words won't alter it. Oh! to think that she should have been here, close by our door, and out in the

storm! Davy, won't you—won't you fetch her back?

David sat silent, sullenly gazing into the fire.

'Davy, you call yourself a Christian man. You wouldn't turn a dog to door on such a night as this, and yet you'll suffer your own child to be wandering on the moor, without a place to lay her head.'

'She can ask for shelter.'

'Shelter! Likely that she who daredn't face her own father and mother, 'ud seek shelter o' strangers!'

As she spoke she opened the cottage door, which, the moment the latch was raised, was flung back heavily by the wind, and a torrent of snow poured in. Like the timid bird, valiant in defence of her fledglings, the mother's gentle nature rose to arms, and battled on behalf of her child.

'Oh David, shame on you! Have you the heart of a man, to sit there like a stone image, when your own flesh and blood may be perishing o' cold and wet? Lord help me, I'm but a feeble old woman, but my only child shan't die outside my door, an' me sitting by the fire within.'

With eager haste the old woman fetched a pillow, and placing it upon the hearthrug, laid the child upon it. Then, her fingers trembling with excitement, she lighted the candle in an old horn lantern, and throwing a thick shawl over her head, snatched up the cloak in which the baby had been wrapped, and rushed to the door.

As she reached it, David rose slowly. 'Well, missus, if you're bound to go, I reckon I'll have to go too. But mind ye this; I'll give the light o' love food and abelter this one night, but never more—never more, remember.'

'I'm her mother, David; I remember that,' said the old woman, her affection for her child overcoming even her wonted awe of her husband. 'And I remember nought else to-night.'

David made no reply. Closing the cottage-door, the old couple started on their quest. David was the first to speak.

'We're on a wild-geese chase, missus, I reckon. How are we to tell which way the wilful wench has gone?'

'The Lord guide us!' said the old woman, despairingly.

The two stood still on the wild moor, uncertain which way to turn; all around them, far as the eye could see, a broad white sheet of snow. Their own cottage was the only dwelling near them, and the remaining houses of the

village lay beyond it, quite in the opposite direction to that which the object of their pursuit had taken. They gazed around them in all directions, but the driving snow obscured their vision. Not a trace was to be seen of the object of their search, and there seemed to be no alternative but to give up the quest. But the quick woman's wit, outstripping the man's slower sense, leapt to a solution of the difficulty. With the eagerness of renewed hope, the old woman exclaimed—

'We'll find her yet, Davy; wi' God's help we'll find her yet. Back to the cot, maister, will 'oe; and gi' me the light.'

Hurriedly the pair retraced their steps. As they neared the porch, the old woman held the lantern close to the ground, carefully examining the snow. After a few moments' search, she exclaimed—

'Here 'tis, sure 'nough, the print of Ally's little feet; I'd know 'em in a hundred. Now, maister, we're in the right track, thanks be to the good Lord that sent the snow.'

Holding the lantern low, and guided by its uncertain light, they followed the track of the small footsteps, already becoming blurred and indistinct under the still falling snow. Fearful of losing the trace before they could overtake the wanderer, they pressed on, weary and panting, but never halting, never wavering in their onward course. They had reached a considerable distance from the cottage, but still no sign, save the still advancing footmarks of her they sought.

Still pressing onward, David spoke, with a strange tremor in his voice. 'Tell 'ee what, missus, there's some'at wisht about this—where can the maid be going o' this side o' the moor? There's never a house for miles.'

His wife made no reply. Still they pressed onward, onward. Each could hear the other's breath, as they panted through the driving wind, which blew in their faces, and buffeted them back, as though opposed to their errand of mercy. Suddenly a cry came from the old woman's lips, a shriek so shrill, so agonized, that, for the moment it alone was heard, and the moaning wind seemed, by contrast, hushed into stillness. She clutched her husband's arm.

'Oh, Davy, hurry on! You're the swiftest, hurry on for dear life. Oh, God in heaven! she's making for the Black Pool!'

With a hoarse cry, like that of a wounded animal, a cry hardly less

fearful, in its subdued anguish, than his wife's agonized shriek, David seized the light, and bounded forward, the old woman following as best she might, her hand pressed to her side, and her grey locks fluttering in the night wind. The feeble glimmer of the lantern became dimmer and dimmer in the distance, and Mary Holt felt her strength fast leaving her, when a shout was heard from David, and the light came to a stop. With renewed energy she pressed forward, and in a few moments was kneeling with her husband on the snow, supporting the insensible form of her lost daughter in her arms. With passionate tenderness the mother chafed the cold hands and kissed the death-white face, striving by close embraces to bring back the spark of life. But all in vain. The unhappy girl lay, as David had found her, a black heap on the snow; so still, so motionless, it seemed as though God had saved the wanderer from the last great sin—that awful sin which, shutting out repentance, shuts out mercy too—by taking to Himself the life she would have cast away.

Still the father and mother, clinging to the shadow of hope, relaxed not their loving efforts. Wrapping the warm woollen cloak about their child's lifeless form, they half dragged, half carried her along till they reached the cottage. Then, while David hastened to the village doctor, the mother essayed such simple means as her homely experience suggested, to recall the spark of life, if perchance it might not yet have faded into utter darkness. After a little while, her loving pains were rewarded by perceiving the beat of a feeble pulse, and the appearance of a faint flush of colour on the white cheek; and, a little later, her ears were gladdened by the sound of the well-known voice, though uttered in the ravings of delirium.

But her happiness was of short duration. Soon the good doctor came, and, with tears standing in his eyes, spoke words of doom. The frail form had suffered more than it could bear, and the little life left was but the fire of fever, which might, or might not, burn through the night. For a little while the light of reason might come back; but if it should so come, it would be but to flicker for a moment, and then be quenched for ever.

And meanwhile, all unconscious of its mother's life ebbing so fast away,—of the wind and snow without, and the rain of tears within,—of life or

death,—of sin or sorrow,—the little babe lay sleeping before the fire; a dimpled arm supporting a dimpled cheek, on which the flickering firelight cast a rosy glory. And the cuckoo-clock on the mantelpiece still ticked on 'Life, death—life, death.' Each tick, each drop of time, as it fell into the ocean of eternity, bringing a stronger throb to the life that was just begun, and stealing one more pulse from the life that was passing away.

With quivering lips and streaming eyes, the father and mother sat by their daughter's pillow, listening in silent anguish to her delirious moanings. Her dying fancy seemed to hover hither and thither about her life; straying far back in the past and recalling incidents of her childish days—incidents long forgotten, but returning now with strange vividness under the influence of her broken sentences. And then a sadder page was turned, and the parents knew (too late!) how their darling had been drawn aside from duty; and the father learnt, with bitter self-reproach, how his own sternness had repelled the loving confidence that had often risen to his child's lips; and which might, under Heaven, have hindered that bitter ending. At one moment she fancied herself with her betrayer, and pleading, as though she had just left her home, for his permission to write to her parents. And here the listeners noticed, with a strange feeling of surprise, that no thought of shame seemed to mingle with her pleadings; she begged as though for leave to communicate joyful tidings, rather than to confess her sin, and sue for pardon.

'Oh, Robert darling, if you would let me tell father and mother, they would be so glad and proud. They will be a little vexed at first, of course, at our having kept it from them, but they will soon forgive that. And if it must be kept secret at present, on account of your uncle, why, I don't think they would mind, at least, not very, very much. And if the people did say hard things of me in the village, I could bear that, for your sake, darling, you know; and perhaps it would only be for a little while. And when you get your uncle's consent (and I'm sure you will, because you make everybody do just as you like, darling) why then it needn't be a secret any longer, need it? And I should be so proud, so proud of my darling soldier Robert. You will let me write, won't you, dear? to please your little pet Ally. I don't

mind about anybody else, but I can't feel quite happy till father and mother know that I am your wife.'

The listeners started, and bent forward with longing eyes, to hear more. But the feeble, fluttering spirit, exhausted by even so short a flight, had sunk down again; and the sufferer's eyelids drooped, and for a while she seemed to slumber. Presently, however, she started again, with a wild cry, and sat up in the bed, gazing with fixed, dilated pupils, and pressing her thin white hands upon her forehead—'Oh, Robert! don't say that. Even in fun, darling, don't say that. You don't know how my heart is beating, even now, when I know it's a joke. Just put your hand against it, dear, and feel. Why don't you look at me, darling; why do you turn away? Robert, it isn't, it can't be true. A false marriage! Oh, Robert, how could you do it, when I trusted you so?'

The loud passionate sobs of the dying girl, as she sat wringing her hands and rocking to and fro in her delirious grief, disturbed the sleeping child, which awoke with a cry. The sound seemed to touch another chord. She ceased her sobs, and listened, smoothing her hair back from her forehead as though trying to recollect something. Her mother, with womanly instinct, put the baby in her arms. A look of sweet content came over the faded face, and she sunk back upon her pillow, nestling the little one to her bosom, and caressing the baby head with her wasted fingers. Then the wandering mind roved into another track.

'Baby dear! baby dear! Baby will never, never go away from his poor mamma, will he? Poor mamma! left all alone with baby in the whole wide world. Hush, dear, mustn't cry; poor mamma Alice may cry, but baby dear mustn't cry. Baby must be a happy baby boy, and grow up strong and handsome, like papa. Oh, baby darling, pray God you may never break anybody's heart! Hush-a-bye, dear, go to sleep on mother's bosom. Mammy will sing to him—sing him to sleep.'

And then she softly crooned a fragment of a song that had been her favourite in the old home-days, a sad song of a faithless love, and with a tender, plaintive burden of one hoping against hope:—

'He will return, I know he will;
He would not leave me here to die.'

The effort of singing seemed to exhaust the sufferer's strength, and soon,

still faintly murmuring that sad refrain, she sank into a heavy slumber. Her mother took advantage of the opportunity to disengage the child from her arms, and to give it some milk, which it swallowed eagerly. This done, the parents continued their quiet watch. The night waned, and the grey light of daybreak stole in at the windows; their daughter still sleeping on, so calmly and peacefully that they would have fain hoped that the worst was over, and that the dawn of renewed life might come with her awaking. But one glance at the sufferer's face forbade them to cherish the sweet delusion. The bright look of youth had faded away from it, and tears had washed away its spring-bloom; but in this last hour the graces of form and colour were replaced by another and higher beauty—a beauty so spiritual, so unearthly, it seemed as though the robe of clay had fallen off, and the soul alone lay sleeping there, biding the summons to spread its wings and take flight to Heaven.

At last, when the sun was high in the heavens, shedding its morning glory far and wide over the crisp white snow, the sleeper awoke. The fire of delirium had given place to the calm light of reason in her eyes, and she gazed around with an inquiring look. 'Have I been ill, mother dear?' she said faintly.

'Yes, darling; very ill.'

'I don't remember falling ill,' said the dying girl; 'everything seems gone from me.'

A tiny cry from baby lips supplied the missing link. The white forehead crimsoned, and the blue eyes filled with tears of grief and shame. 'I remember now. Oh, mother; can you ever forgive me?'

A loving kiss was the mother's only answer. But it said enough.

'And father, does he know? Will he forgive me too?'

David Holt rose, and stood by his daughter's bedside, looking down upon her with ineffable love and tenderness. The old love for his only child, repressed so long, now swept away all barriers; pride, self-will, resentment, all were forgotten in the deep emotion of that bitter hour.

'My darling, may God forgive me as freely as I have forgiven you all that I have to forgive!'

'If you and mother forgive me, I can feel almost happy again. Oh, how nice it is to be at home! But how did I come here? Who brought me?'

The father and mother interchanged

glances. 'We found you on the moor last night, Ally, and brought you home.'

'Last night! last night! I don't remember. It's all gone from me. I seem mazed like; and oh, so weak! Mother dear, am I dying?'

The old woman tried to speak, but grief choked her. David answered for her, himself little less moved. 'My child, life and death are in the Lord's hands. His will be done!'

'Nay, David,' said his wife, with an effort; 'don't give the child a false hope now. Ally dear, we fear—indeed, we know that—that—' The mother's voice broke down, but her choking sobs told all the rest.

There was the faintest quiver of the drooping eyelids, and a single tear rolled over the wasted cheek.

'Are you afraid to die, Ally?' said her father.

'No, father dear, I don't think I'm afraid: I've longed for death many and many a time lately, and prayed to be ready to meet it; and now it has come, I don't fear much. But it's hard to leave you and mother so soon after I have got you back, and my poor little baby. May I have him now, please mother? it won't be very long, I think. There is such a strange feeling of numbness coming over me.'

The babe was placed in her arms, and she kissed and fondled it with passionate tenderness. 'Oh, my baby! my baby! it's very, very hard to leave my little wee baby all alone!'

'Not alone, darling, not alone,' sobbed her mother.

'No, not alone,' said the dying girl, smiling through her tears; 'not quite alone, after all. Mother dear, I give him to you, the last gift of your poor wayward Ally.'

'My darling, I take him, not as a gift, but as a precious trust—a trust to keep for his mother in heaven.'

There was a long quiet pause, in which nothing was heard save the heavy breathing of the dying girl, and the hard tick of the clock on the mantelpiece, counting her life away.

The solemn stillness was broken at last, by a voice so faint and low, the listeners had to bend forward to catch the parting words. 'Mother dear, where are you? I can't see you! How dark it is getting.—Hark! they are calling to me.'

The dying arms drew the babe closer in a last embrace. 'Mother dear—baby—don't forget. God bless—' And then the soul flew away with the

blessing on its lips, and sped to finish its loving prayer at the foot of the great white Throne.

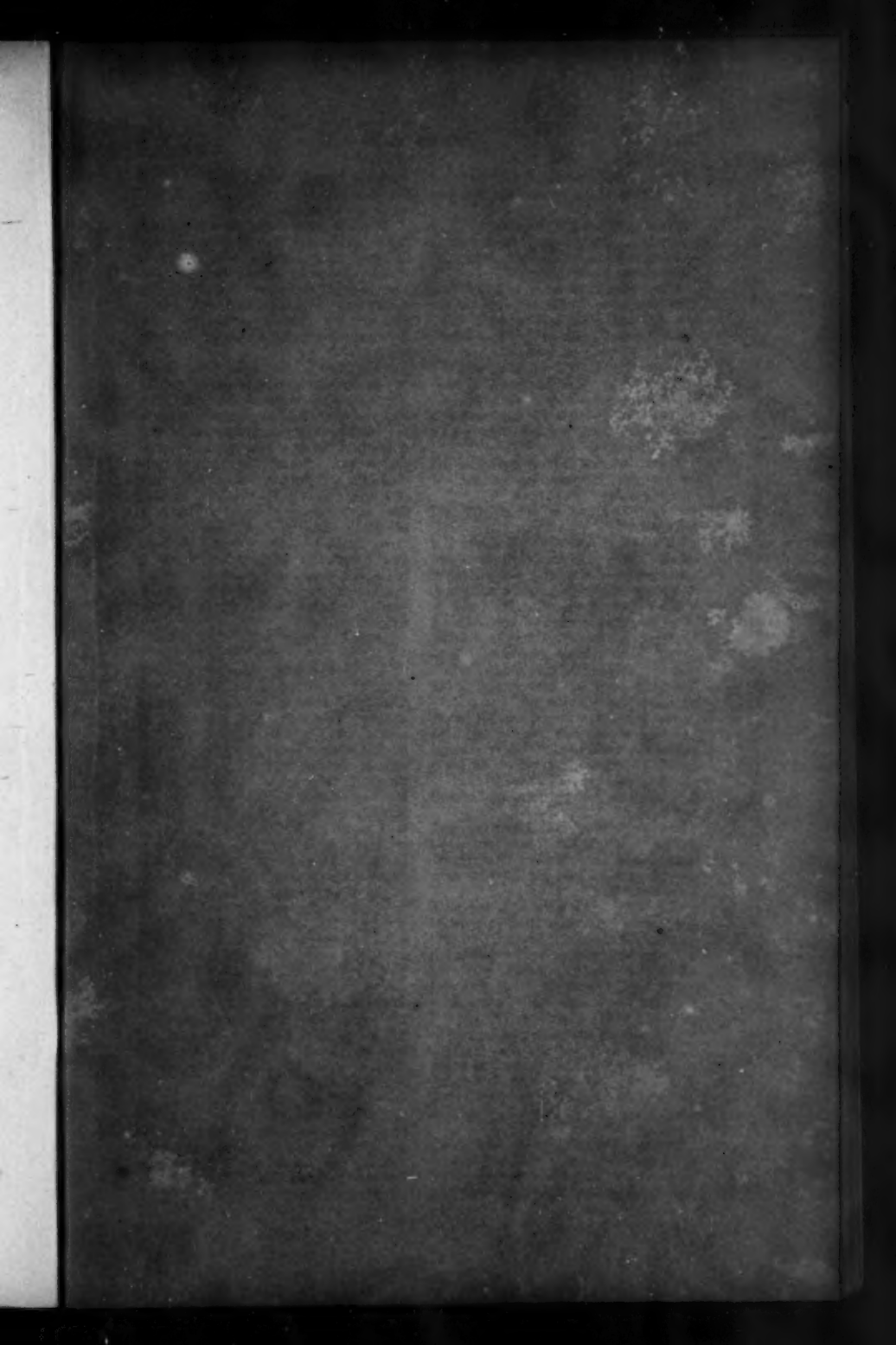
A corner of the window-curtain had fallen aside, and through the opening a stray sunbeam crept in, and fell, quartered by an intersection of the lattice, upon the white coverlet. Was it an omen? Was it chance? The lifeless form, with a smile on its silent lips, lay sleeping UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS.

And now, as the freed soul shook the earth from its wings, and spread its pinions for its heavenward flight, the church-bells burst forth with their chime of joy and gladness, in honour of the Christmas morn. The sound of the joyous peal floated into the death-chamber, and brought sweet hope and peace to the aching hearts within. The mother's face was and, but the look of weary longing had passed away. 'God knows best, Davy dear. Without this bitter cup, mayhap we wouldn't have had peace and good-will in our hearts to-day. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be His name!'

Amen! Amen!

A sad Christmas story—say you? Is it so? Perhaps it is; but there are Christmas tears as well as Christmas smiles. The very holly, the token of mirth and merriment, is but the symbol of the Saviour's crown of thorns; the crimson berries the type of the blood-drops on His brow. And shall we, born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, never feel a prick in our Christmas crown? Not so! To many, to most, it shall occur to be at some time in their lives, in the valley of the Shadow on Christmas day: the season of joy to Christendom shall be to them the hour of mourning and deepest sorrow. To them (till grace bring balm) music shall have no melody; even the song of peace and good-will shall be 'like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh.' But to the happy ones whose loss they mourn, far otherwise. To their truer sense, attuned to the harps of heaven, all universe shall join in harmonious chorus with the sweet angel-song, whose echo is faintly heard on earth at this Christmas season. The peace on earth, imperfect at the best, and the goodwill among men, so often marred by earthly passion, shall fade into nothingness before the 'unspeakable gift,' the 'perfect peace' of Heaven.

A. J. L.





ABSENT FRIENDS.

FRIENDS have we been for nearly a year—
 Off have our glasses slinked together;
 We, meeting round this table here,
 This seasonable Christmas weather,
 We'll drink, before the evening closes,
 A parting glass to 'Absent Friends!'

All do not meet who once have met,
 The some have fallen midway life's road,
 And some, who are dying yet,
 Long miles of land and sea between,
 Thus hope with love that some be blest,
 In pledging to us 'Absent Friends!'

There's Charles, through former friends' eyes,
 Whose smiling, warm face has faded;
 Jack watches the Pacific's tide,
 Flying downwards over the great bridge,
 'Till home he's along with world's affairs,
 We pledge them both to 'Absent Friends!'

There's Jack's little figure on the coast,
 Whose words are 'laughs' and 'a' and 'laughs';
 While Ted is in the land that breeds
 'Dead Revells' 'Faint' and 'Tep' and 'Grogg';
 To Paul and Woot kind wishes make,
 This toast we drink to 'Absent Friends!'

Yet leave a few distant Tom to drink,
 Who—five streets off—is home and living,
 To wake all night, with doubts and fears,
 When that poor, with his slowly dying
 Thus comes to the last approach,
 Upon the morrow 'Absent Friends!'

Will someone let sympathy visit
 (He will, at her prayers—and we know)
 And Paul dreams to for the smile
 Of one who has his heart in keeping—
 She humbles a heart, but never meets;
 Ah, well! we'll toast her 'Absent Friends!'

We, who have known each other long,
 Once more about this table gather
 To spend the night in mirth and song,
 This seasonable Christmas weather—
 Let each, then, ere he homeward goes,
 Drink our last glass to 'Absent Friends!'

Some sink—some swim! some fight—some fall!
 The almost circle fast is breaking!
 Let's ask God's blessing on them all,
 Be glad as good—on land or afloat!
 For the kind, constant leaves back,
 With closed eyes, our 'Absent Friends!'

THE END.



ABSENT FRIENDS.

FRIENDS have we been for many a year—
 Oft have our glasses clinked together;
 So, meeting round this table here,
 This seasonable Christmas weather,
 We'll drink—before the evening ends—
 A parting glass to 'Absent Friends!'

All do not meet who once have met,
 For some have fallen asleep for ever;
 And many, who are living yet,
 Long miles of land and sea dis sever.
 Thus hope with love and sorrow blends,
 In pledging to our 'Absent Friends!'

There's Charles through frozen Russia rides,
 Where howling wolves pursue his sledges;
 Jack watches the Pacific's tides
 Fling diamonds o'er the coral ledges:—
 'Twixt these the whole wide world extends.
 We pledge them both as 'Absent Friends!'

There's Dick hunts tigers on the coasts,
 Where towns are 'baghs' and 'bads' and 'nuggers':—
 While Ted is in the land that boasts
 'Dead Rabbits,' 'Bhoys,' and 'Ugly Pluggers,'
 To East and West kind wishes sends
 This toast we drink, of 'Absent Friends!'

Yet scarce less distant Tom appears,
 Who—five streets off—is homeward hieing,
 To watch all night, with doubts and fears,
 Where that poor wife lies slowly dying.
 Thus sympathy its tear expends
 Upon the toast of 'Absent Friends!'

Will shuns us for companions vile
 (His wife is at her prayers—and weeping);
 And Fred deserts us for the smile
 Of one who has his heart in keeping,—
 She breaks a heart, but never mends!
 Ah, well! we'll toast our 'Absent Friends!'

We, who have known each other long,
 Once more about this table gather,
 To spend the night in mirth and song,
 This seasonable Christmas weather:—
 Let each, then, ere he homeward wends,
 Drink one last glass to 'Absent Friends!'

Some sink—some swim; some fight—some fall;
 The ancient circle fast is thinning!
 Let's ask God's blessing on them all,
 On glad or good—on sad or sinning!
 For one kind, constant heaven bends,
 With star-soft eyes, o'er 'Absent Friends!'

TOM HOOD.

CHRISTMAS DAY IN TRAFALGAR SQUARE.

BEING THE EARLIEST RECORDED INSTANCE OF KISSING UNDER THE
MISTLETOE.

IN precisely what year I am sure I don't know,
It was such a tremendously long time ago;
But London, I think, must have been very small,
If indeed such a village existed at all—
For 'twas long ere the Romans came over from Gaul—
Well—may *anno* a hundred and fifty, B.C.
Where the Nelson column now happens to be,
A jolly old Briton lived under a tree.

He lived in a hut,
A rough wood-cut,
With two daughters, both charming, though brown as a nut.
Their mother was dead,
And the neighbours all said
That while she was living, the old boy had led
Such a life that he trembled with positive dread
At the thought of another partaking his bed.
(You see in all ages such scandals are spread!)
Be this as it may be, no more would he wed,
So the girls did the cooking and so on instead.

The old Briton, I think, led a glorious life,—
At all events after the loss of his wife,
About whom the stories I've mentioned were rife;
He could spear a wild boar
At his own very door,
And catch plenty of fish from the neighbouring shore;
And of game he'd as much as he wanted, or more;
And of skins and such matters he'd always a store:
And he'd placidly smoke
Neath the shade of his oak,—
No, stop. That won't do. It's enough to provoke
Any rhymer alive! I am sure it's no joke
To lose such a picture as that; but indeed
I really fear I am bound to concede,
That he never had tasted the comforting weed:
He existed too early:—but then he could soak!
Yes, I hope and I think
That he'd something to drink!

What it was I'm not certain, and therefore I shrink
From giving its name: but I know he'd not heard
Of the Temperance movement, and as for the word
'Teetotaler,' that he'd have voted absurd:—
So I hope it's a logical *sequitur ut*,
The old Briton had got something good in his hut.

Of his daughters, the elder was over eighteen,
With magnificent eyes, and the style of a queen;
Stately, and tall, and majestic in mien;
And of course unencumbered by stiff crinoline.
The other, her sister, perhaps may have been
A year younger, or two years, or somewhere between:
She always was merry, lighthearted, and gay,
And was laughing and singing the whole of the day,
And her breath was as sweet as the Midsummer hay;
She never was troubled with blues or the spleen,
And a prettier lassie there never was seen.

Now the reader of course will imagine that, though
This was such a tremendously long time ago,
Neither one of such beauties could want for a beau:

And such was the case,
For each charming young face
Half the youth of the parish drew to the place;
But the hearts of the sisters none ever could touch,
Though they painted and daubed themselves never so much :
Black and brown
Wouldn't go down ;
Yellow and red
Were tried instead ;
Green and blue,
But nothing would do :

Till the ladies declared that the smell of the paint
Was very unpleasant,—it made them so faint !
Unadorned then a few of the ardent ones came :
But come as they would, the result was the same.

And so the young maidens, in fancy free,
Lived on with the governor under the tree :

Till at length, on a day
In the middle of May,
Through the forest together they happened to stray ;
And wandered along, without heeding the way,
Till the evening twilight began to be gray :
Then their path was obstructed by marshes and bogs,
And they heard the tumultuous croaking of frogs ;
For they'd got down along to the Island of Dogs.

Then thinking it best
To take some little rest
Before turning their faces again to the west,
They had just sat them down on a moss-covered bank,
When lo ! with an arrow stuck into his flank,

With a grunt and a roar,
A tremendous wild boar,—
Such a monster they'd never encountered before,—
With foaming mouth, and with eyeballs red,
Gnashing his teeth, and shaking his head,
Rushed at the bank where the sisters reclined,
As if, by his fury made morally blind,
For revenge upon them he had made up his mind !

One fell left
And the other fell right,
Of power bereft
By their terrible fright ;
Unable to run, scarcely able to scream,
Like people attacked in some horrible dream ;—
When just as the monster drew fearfully near
A handsome young man, who was armed with a spear,
Dropped down from a tree in the midst of a thicket,
Confronted the boar, and managed to ' stick ' it !

Thanks to this, they were much more frightened than hurt,
Though a little bit soiled by their roll in the dirt ;—
And when they had somewhat recovered the shock,
Of the youth they began, as we say, to ' take stock,'
As ladies are likely to do in such cases.
But, oh ! what rich blushes spread over their faces,
As they saw such an elegant well-dressed young fellow !
Not a bit like those men streaked with red, blue, and yellow ;
But superior far to all mortals they'd seen,
As seem pantomime fairies to boys of fifteen !

I should make a sad mess
Of describing his dress ;
I know nothing about it, I freely confess.
Antiquarian studies are not in my line,
But I know that the girls thought it wondrously fine !
Well, they spoke ; but he only replied by a sign ;

Christmas Day in Trafalgar Square.

Smiled and bowed, shook his head, laid his hand on his heart,
And endeavoured to show he'd escort them a part
Of their way when they felt they were able to start.

Now I don't see myself how they could have demurred
To his seeing them home after what had occurred;
And so thought the girls; so they walked on together,
Conversing by signs on the state of the weather,
Which of course was first talked of, and then of each other:
And he soon understood that they hadn't a mother,
Nor any relation, not even a brother,
Excepting their father, and two or three dozens
Of very affectionate masculine cousins.

While he, on his part, on the sisters impressed
That the least said about him for him would be best.
And though language was useless, they managed without it
To promise they'd not tell a creature about it:
So he walked with them nearly the whole of the way,
And they parted, to meet on the following day;
And the girls went to bed, and there dreamt of the stranger
Who had rescued them both from such imminent danger.

Now the girls didn't comprehend very distinctly
The foreigner's story: but I must succinctly,
And briefly as may be consistent with truth,
Give the reader some little account of the youth.

The facts then are these:—The young man was the skipper
Of a ship of Phœnicia, a regular clipper:
An adventurous, gallant young sailor was he,
And 'twas something in those days to follow the sea!
A very 'taut hand,' too, when fairly afloat;
But as soon as he'd got on his shore-going coat
He could dance a good hornpipe, could sing a good song,
Or could spin you a yarn, sir, as tough and as long
As the monstrous sea-snake, which, at rest and in motion,
He'd often been close to when sailing the ocean,
With a hundred things more, of which we have no notion!

I'm really sad

To feel I must add

One trait of his character awfully bad!
To the ladies he ever was paying his court,
And he'd several sweethearts in every port:—
A fault which, as ill-natured people do say,
Is still common with sailors to this very day!

Some archæological savans deny

That ships crossed from Phœnicia at all:—'tis the mode

To deny all such things;—but to this I reply,

'The archæological savans be blowed!'

For the trade that our gallant Phœnician was in,

Was the coming to Cornwall for cargoes of tin!

He'd got safely to 'Ictia,' had loaded his cargo,

And set sail for home: but before he could far go,

A gale had sprung up with such terrible force

As to drive him up channel, clean out of his course;

For he hadn't the signals, the cone and the drum,

To give him a warning of what was to come!

The sea ran so high that he couldn't do more

Than keep her before it, till rounding the Fore-

Land he crept along under the lee of the shore,

Not daring to land till he got to the Nore!

Then seeing a river he'd not seen before,

That river he made up his mind to explore:

So he brought up his craft all the way to Blackwall;

There, concealed by some trees, and some underwood tall,

He drew her to land, made her fast with a cable,

And repaired her as well as his people were able.

Now, though young, our Phœnician was not at all 'green,'
Very much he had heard of, and much he had seen,
And was called a shrewd fellow wherever he'd been.
He knew all about freights, and the wages of men,
And primage and average, as they were then.
He was fully aware that when people have tin
They are apt among strangers to get taken in.
So he thought it as well that the natives around
Shouldn't know where his vessel and he could be found
(And I fancy in this that his judgment was sound);
Thus he ordered his crew to stick close to the ship;
But he very often would give them the slip,
Just to wander around, and see what he could see;
And was taking a look from the top of a tree,
When the sisters had come, and the rush of the boat
Had caused the adventure narrated before.
Now the girls pleased his taste, but he'd seen many nations,
So thought it as well to avoid their relations.

Well, three weeks or thereabouts soon sped away,
And they met at a trysting-place every day.
'Twould be strange if he hadn't enjoyed the variety
Of such very agreeable female society;
So the sailor was very attentive—and by it he

Meant nothing amiss—

'Twould be very remiss

Not to be so. And could there be harm in a kiss,
Just once now and then? It was surely no crime,
But a capital method of passing the time.
But before very long he fell something above
Head and ears—or he fancied so—truly in love:
With the elder, of course, there was something about her
He couldn't resist; and she seemed not to doubt her
Own right to the foreigner's love and devotion;
That she could have a rival she hadn't a notion.
Then learning her language a bit, by degrees,
He managed to tell her that mountains, and trees,
And rocks, and rivers, and oceans, and seas
Might all go to smash; but that once having met her,
He never, no never again could forget her!
And she took it all in, for she didn't know better;
And then, on her part, she loved him with a passion,
Which in these days is happily out of the fashion.

But how of the other,—that maiden so gay,
Who was laughing and singing the whole of the day?
Ah me! The song became sadder and lower,
And the sweet girlish laugh wasn't heard any more;
And her eyes seemed as though they had need of more sleep
And a trifling matter would cause her to weep;
And the blueses would suddenly mount to her cheek,
And then soon fade away; and she'd seem very weak,
And look very pale, and be all of a tremble;
But somehow she managed the cause to dissemble;
And no one observed it—not even her sister,
Who saw that she did all she could to assist her
In meeting her lover; and never suspected
How the heart of the poor little girl was affected!

Back in the days ere the Roman invasion,
Toothaches weren't frequent, and headaches were rare;
Heartaches, however, would come, on occasion—

Every age has of them got its share!

Colds too were caught when, in spite of dissuasion,

Ladies would brave the chill evening air.

Thus it chanced that the Briton's magnificent daughter
Caught a very bad cold in her head; and bethought her
Of soaking her feet in a pan of hot water

Christmas Day in Trafalgar Square.

(A plan which a learned old Druid had taught her);
 So she couldn't go out very well, but besought her
 Sister, for fear the young man would be surly,
 To meet him, and say she had gone to bed early;
 For she felt so unwell that it wouldn't be right
 To keep her appointment that showery night.

So the poor little girl went away to the place,
 To tell the Phœnician the state of the case.
 As we've seen, for some weeks the young fellow she'd known,
 But never before had she met him alone:
 And she went, for another, to this assignation
 In a state of exceedingly great agitation:
 And her cheeks wore a flush, and her voice had a tremor,
 To a man of the world quite enough to condemn her!
 Now, to tell all they said were a difficult task;
 And I hope for particulars no one will ask.
 Ever truehearted and pure was she:—
 Pure as a pearl in a fathomless sea!
 But yet she lingered, and lingered yet:
 For no bonnet had she, to be spoiled by the wet;
 And she wasn't distracted by fears for a gown,
 Though some rain on the oak-leaves came pattering down.
 She was wrong to remain—very wrong:—but, you know,
 It was such a tremendously long time ago!
 In the times that we live in it wouldn't be so.
 How she could be so foolish I never could learn,
 But a long time elapsed, and she didn't return!

What is that strange, unaccountable feeling,
 Flashing upon us so quickly, revealing,
 Plainly as may be, that something is wrong—
 Striking us like the refrain of a song;
 Lost and forgotten for ever so long?
 Metaphysicians may possibly know:—
 Certain it is that it often is so:
 And that just such a flash of intelligence told
 The poor girl who was laid up at home with the cold,
 That she, somehow or other, was probably 'sold'!
 So, forgetting her health in her horrible doubt,
 She determined to 'see what that girl was about.'

The sun had sunk behind the hill
 The evening air was soft and still;
 The bubbling gurgle of the rill
 Rose from the shadowed dell;
 On fresh young leaves, where rain-drops hung,
 On quaint old trunks, where the ivy clung,

The glistening moonbeams fell:

O'er the trees faint, fitful rustlings crept,
 O'er the sky one dark cloud slowly swept,
 And the flowers breathed sweetly as they slept.

Onward she ran with bosom bare;
 With panting breath and streaming hair;
 Dashing the showers in silver spray,
 From the dripping ferns and the brimming 'May':
 On, without pausing or checking her pace,
 Till close to the well-known trying-place,—
 A gnarled old oak with branches low,
 Where grew the sacred mistletoe!

If you're dunned, when your pockets are empty and void,
 You are apt, at the least, to feel rather annoyed;
 When the horse you've backed heavily loses the race,
 You don't take it, I fear, with a very good grace;
 When your tragedy's damned, and your comedy hissed,
 You may probably feel in a bit of a twist;

When the girl of your heart runs away with another,
It's not very easy your feelings to smother;
You get wild when the bank where you've trusted your cash
Goes some morning to swift irremediable amash;
But no one, as wits and philosophers tell us,
Can be ever so mad as a woman that's jealous!

The old Briton from hunting had just come back,
And was looking around for a bit of a snack;
And thinking of taking his something-and-water,
When the door was flung open, and in came his daughter!

'Oh father!' she cried, 'come quickly with me,
There is sacrilege done to our holy tree!
That vile, hypocritical, shameless, audacious,
Unprincipled girl! Oh my goodness! oh gracious!
To think I've a creature like that for a sister!
The impudent thing! I'm determined, I'll twist her
Young neck, when I catch her;—the hussey, I will!
Come along! I am sure we shall find her there still.
What is it? Why, there, 'neath our holy old oak,—
Oh, father, some water! I'm ready to choke!
There she is with a foreigner—says he's a seaman,
But, for my part, I really think he's a demon!
For no man, I am sure, such a villain could be;
He has pulled all the mistletoe off from the tree.
Of the mistletoe boughs he has made her a bower,
And there he's been kissing her more than an hour!
Oh, call up the neighbours, arouse all the men!
Come, be quick, or you'll ne'er see your daughter again!'

To our Briton the story was not very clear,
But his daughters to him were exceedingly dear;
And he hated the name of a foreign mounseer,
Though he never had seen one, which seems rather queer;
So he went to a corner, and took up his spear,
And then called up his friends who were resident near;
And they followed the girl, who was mad as a hatter,
In order to find out what was the matter.

And when they drew near to the trysting-place,
Behold! the young girl in a stranger's embrace!
She, poor thing, was weeping sadly;—
Weeping because she was acting so badly,—
Weeping because it was time they should part,—
Weeping as though she were breaking her heart!
He was kissing her brow so fair,
Smoothing her tresses of soft brown hair:
Then anon whispering low in her ear,
Bidding her drive away sorrow and fear.
And 'twas true,—he had pulled down the mistletoe
From the hoary old oak where 'twas wont to grow:—
Of the mistletoe boughs he had made her a bower,
And spread his cloak on them to keep off a shower,—
And there she'd been loitering nearly an hour.

The Britons all gazed,
For a moment amazed;
And then sprung upon him in sudden attack;
But the stranger came up to the scratch in a crack;
And then there was scuffling, struggling, fighting,
Striking and thrusting, and kicking and biting,—
A general row! But the youth of Phoenicia
Hit out as Tom King hit the Boy of Lenicia;
Knocked over a Druid and one or two dozens
Of very affectionate masculine cousins:—
Then seeing a bit of an opening clear,
He stooped very suddenly, caught up a spear,

Christmas Day in Trafalgar Square.

Made a swift lunge at one, gave another a kick,
 And then lost not a moment in cutting his stick.
 They pursued him of course, but he gave them the slip.
 And somehow or other got safe to his ship;
 Set sail, for she now was in seaworthy state,
 And I never have heard any more of his fate.

But ah! that fatal lunge
 Of the swift and deadly spear!
 To think that it must into his bosom plunge
 Among all that are crowding near!

I wouldn't have minded a cousin or two,
 Or one of the canting Druidical crew;
 But the heart of the jolly old Briton it found,
 And his life's blood was poured on the soaking ground!
 Then sad was the fate of the sisters twain,
 Who would never have father or lover again!
 Theirs was horror and grief, not unmixed with remorse,
 And some mutual recriminations of course;
 And the Druids were savage as savage could be,
 On account of the sacrilege done to the tree;
 And because the old Briton's life's blood had been split,
 To the girls they unjustly imputed the guilt.
 It was plain that they both had encouraged the stranger,
 And their lives were at first in no trifling danger.
 But their judges at length took a little compassion,
 Though such feelings were then not at all in the fashion;
 And their sentence was this,—they must live all alone,—
 Not together, but each in a place of her own,
 They were not to go out to have any variety,
 Or ever to mingle again in society;
 And this under peril of body and soul,—
 The chief Druid's decree—'twas approved by the whole.

So for each was a dwelling of wicker-work made,
 In the gloomiest depths of the dark forest shade:
 And there the girls lived, making trinkets of beads,
 Or some substitute for them, and whistles of reeds,
 Which they bartered away for the means of subsistence,
 And thus, 'till they died, they dragged on their existence.

And their lonely retreats 'mid the dark forest shades
 Still exist in our two famous London arcades.
 That of Burlington stands where the elder abided,
 And the Lowther Arcade where the younger resided,—
 More cheerful perhaps, if it isn't so grand,
 And a pleasant retreat from the noise of the Strand.
 While the Burlington makes a more stylish display;
 There you don't hear so many accordions play;
 And the things are not put so much out in the way;
 And the beadle's more stately, though not so gay:
 So they keep in some measure, I think I may say,
 The girls' characteristics to this very day!

And a kiss 'neath the mistletoe bough, from the time
 Of the sentence, the Druids denounced as a crime,—
 Which was clearly uncalled for by reason or rhyme.
 And because 'twas forbidden, of course it was done,
 As is common in most matters under the sun,
 And the custom itself from that time was begun;
 And ere long it was thought to be capital fun.
 And still, though the times of the Druids have passed,
 The custom continues; and long may it last!
 But to show we've no heathenish prejudice now,
 'Tis at Christmas we hang up the mistletoe bough;
 When its leaves are green, and its berries are white,
 And the cheer is good, and the fires are bright,
 And every heart is happy and light;

And no one feels jealousy, anger, or spite;
And a kiss never causes a scandal or fright,
Much less gives rise to a row or a fight,
Because it's well known to be proper and right!

But, reader, when next you stroll through the arcades,
Remember the tale of the two pretty maids;
And whenever the Nelson column you see,
Drop a tear, if you can!—'twill be grateful to me;—
And perhaps to the fountains a boon it may be,—
For the jolly old boy who lived under the tree!—E. T. L.

THE ANGEL'S PORTION.

A CHRISTMAS LYRIC. FROM THE SWEDISH OF J. L. RUNEBERG.

THE Finland Christmas moon was cold;
A peasant trudged across the wold;
Behind his back the town-dogs' bay
Fainter and fainter died away;
Till nought upon his ear there fell
But cat-a-mountain's hungry yell.

Through snow he urged his heavy feet,
For wife and bairns he longed to greet;
In naked hut they made their bed,
And birchwood bark was half their bread;
But now a festive treat he bore,
The bounty of a rich man's door.

The drifted snow he skirted round:
What sees he, crouching on the ground?
Dumb with the cold, a childish form,
Blowing its hands to keep them warm;
And, lit by gleaming snow alone,
Half changed it seems to ghastly stone.

'What brought thee here, poor lad?' quoth he;
'Thou must go warm thyself with me.'
His arms upheld the frozen weight:
He reached at length his homestead gate;
And deemed he entered, doubly blest,
With cheering food and starving guest.

The comfort of his days was there;
Their youngest at her breast she bare;
'Long hast thou tramped about the snow:
Come where the hearth is all a-glow!
And thou the same!' like mother mild
She welcomed in the outcast child.

And soon, beneath her busy hand,
A brighter life was in the brand:
She thought of grinding want no more;
So pleased she took her husband's store;
And spread it out for suppertide,
With scanty bowl of milk beside.

From scattered straw upon the ground,
The children cross'd the narrow bound
'Twixt bed and board, a merry pack;
Only the stranger boy hung back:
The mother forward drew her guest,
And found him room among the rest.

And, when an evening grace was said,
She shared around the festal bread;
The boy returned a soft reply,
Breaking the crust; and in his eye,
The while he spoke, a tear there stood;
'Blest are the offerings of the good!'

Flirtation à la Mode.

With bread in hand she stood, prepared
 To share herself, as she had shared;
 But, at that solemn tone, amazed,
 Upon her tender guest she gazed;
 And looked and wondered more and more
 He seemed no longer as before.

His eyes were like the stars of light;
 His cheeks were glowing, rosy-bright;
 The rags of earth away were borne,
 Like mists before the breath of morn;
 It was an angel, smiling there,
 And fair as only heaven is fair.

Beam'd brighter still the semph boy:
 Beat every heart with holy joy:
 Long to the peasants' hut may cleave
 The memory of that Christmas Eve;
 For nobler board was never drest,—
 The angel stay'd to be their guest.

It chanced, when many a year had fled,
 One Christmas Eve I reached the shed:
 The good folks' hearth was still the same;
 But, seated in its glowing flame,
 With early winter on his brow,
 Their grandson was the father now.

'Twas all so glad; 'twas all so good;
 His gentle mate, his ruddy brood:
 'Twas all as though on every face
 There lay the calm of evening grace:
 'Twas all as though indeed they felt
 That in a hallowed home they dwelt.

High on the board one taper light
 (Their only one) was burning bright;
 And milk and wheaten bread were there;
 But no one touched that daintier fare:
 I ask'd whose portion yonder lay;—
 'Tis the good angel's,' answered they.

H. W.

FLIRTATION A LA MODE.

A Reminiscence of Last Season.

SO De Courcy has promised to take you
 To Lady de Lyrium's ball;
 How happy the prospect must make you!
 What raptures your senses enthrall!

Of course you are flattered—delighted;
 The *crème de la crème* will be there;
 For though 'all the world' is invited,
 It's only the world of Mayfair.

At eve you rush off like a madman,
 In a most irreproachable tie,
 And are done by an insolent cabman,
 Who doesn't as he'd be done by.

And then, pushing past heavy fathers,
 You edge through the crush on the stairs,
 Where girls who've been tearing their garters
 Are trying to gather their tears.



Drawn by Marcus Stone.

FLIRTATION À LA MODE.

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Then you meet with some golden-haired beauty,
 Who smiles in a soft winning way,
 And you wish it were only your duty
 To guard her for ever and aye.

Of course she's engaged for the Lancers—
 Engaged to the man with red hair;
 And you stand, grimly watching the dancers,
 The picture of gloomy despair.

'The next?' 'Yes.' Enraptured, delighted,
 You pencil your name on her card;
 Nor dream how your hopes will be blighted,
 The Parca, how cruelly hard!

Enraptured by the fairy-like vision,
 You talk in a soft undertone;
 At Fortune you'd smile in derision,
 If you might but call her your own.

The music begins—it's the 'Mabel';
 You waltz to the *trois-temps*, of course;
 And glide off, as soon as you're able,
 A path through the dancers to force.

Oh rapture! you float on together;
 What moments of precious delight!
 You think that no mortal was ever
 So favoured as you are that night.

And then, while revolving, you've told her,
 How oft you'll that evening recall;
 When, her head drooping low on your shoulder,
 You waltzed at that beautiful ball.

'The next?' she replies, 'Well—I'd really—
 But what would my chaperone say?'
 And you're sure that she negatives merely
 Since *convenances* stand in the way.

But she whispers, 'We're all going to-morrow
 To the grand Horticultural fête';
 And now you must leave her in sorrow,
 Mamma says, 'It's getting so late.'

Though tickets for fêtes are expensive,
 And the flowers—well—only so-so,
 One goes to see toilettes extensive,
 So *that* doesn't matter, you know.

At last when arrived you perceive her,
 And smile with a confident air,
 You find that the gay young deceiver
 Pretends not to know you are there.

Non quinge! those visions have fled;
 Those *châteaux en Espagne* are gone;
 Your fond hopes are withered—defeated;
 Your heart feels forsaken—forlorn.

But what if in beauty she's peerless?
 What if she has bright flashing eyes?
 Is that any reason why, cheerless,
 You're heaving those impotent sighs?

No! light up the potent cabana;
 To the sex bid a cynic's adieu;
 Consume the weed nicotiana,
 And read the 'Reviling Review.'

Away then to scenes that are foreign!
 'Tis best as it is—for I fear
 That your sylph could not, like Mrs. Warren,
 Keep house on two hundred a year!

H. W. M.

THREE REMARKABLE CHRISTMAS DAYS.

WHERE is the Englishman to be found who has not felt that he has lost a chapter out of life's duodecimo if he has passed a Christmas Day without in some sort distinguishing it from the other three hundred and sixty-four days? Where is the Christian, who, either from motives of piety or the force of tradition, and the early souvenirs of home does not, on each recurring anniversary, endeavour to add to his own physical enjoyment, or contribute to the gaiety of others? Whether in the arctic regions, or the torrid zone, or away in the southern seas among the whalers, or wandering on the western prairies, the Englishman remembers the familiar words, 'A merry Christmas and a happy New Year.' They instinctively suggest themselves as the day comes round, and operate like magic upon his heart, suddenly reviving many a fond recollection of kindly greetings, affectionate pledges, and cheerful evenings before the crackling log. It is the happy lot of some men to pass the whole round of their lives within hail of the family circle, and once a year to meet the faces they love so well, and from which the pursuits of business may have separated them during the rest of the year. Others, again, are from an early period wanderers from the paternal home, and only revisit the scenes of their happy youth at long intervals, to find everything changed—old manners gone, and strangers filling the space once occupied by beloved and familiar faces. The writer of these lines may be numbered with the erratic. For forty long years he has been more or less away from the land of his fathers, and his Christmas Days have rarely been distinguished by a participation in the festivities which are germane to the period, and agreeable to antique usage. *As contraire*, he has passed some of his 'festivals' after a manner the reverse of agreeable, three striking illustrations of which fact opportunely present themselves. The reader will probably agree that they at least deserve the epithet, 'remarkable.'

CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE TIGERS.

I had been for some time residing at Bagdad, in 183-. Curiosity to visit a city rendered so famous by the 'Arabian Nights' Entertainments, led me (from India) first to visit Bassora, the Balsorah

of the Thousand and One Nights, and then the city of the Caliph, whose fame has supplied the title to a pretty opera now rarely performed. And when I had supped sufficiently full of all the attractions of the quaint old city, which had not then involved its Turkish aspect in dark-blue woollen vestment and the scarlet fez, I made preparations for a journey across the desert to Damascus, for the Holy Land was the ultimate object of my travels. To effect this in safety, it was necessary to don the garment of an Arab, to allow the beard a few weeks' growth, and to study the phrases which would be requisite to help me on my perilous journey. My previous residence in India facilitated the acquisition of the accent, and I could soon pronounce the *Salaam Alec Koum* with orthodox accuracy. The science of eating a pilaw with my fingers, and tearing away pieces of roast lamb as if I had never known the use of knife and fork, was acquired after a little greasy practice and I even learnt to toss off a noggin of raki with as much *sang froid* as if it had been a glass of Hodgson's pale ale. At length, having negotiated the hire of a horse and camel with the chief of a *cafila* (caravan), and paid in advance for protection, I bade adieu to my old friend, Colonel Taylor, the British agent and resident, and set forth with some fifty companions, viz. three merchants, two moollahs, a special *idlar*, my servant, a sheikh, and forty-two thieves under the denomination of pilgrims, returning from Mecca and acting as guards of the merchandise. We had made a four days' journey, and had halted for the night in the desert at a spot where the camel-thorn was tolerably abundant. It was Christmas Eve. I had eaten a good supper of lamb, stewed in dried apricots, and taken my dram to the health of absent friends preparatory to a snooze, when my attention was attracted to a wailing cry in another part of the bivouac. I listened: gradually this was followed by a murmur, and then another cry, and soon the whole party was in a state of excitement very unusual among sober Mussulmans. I told my servant, Humud, to go quietly and ascertain the cause. He was not long gone when he hurried back with tottering steps to tell me that THE PLAGUE had broken out in the caravan, and not a soul was safe.

Two men were dying, one had died: others were sick, and all were apprehensive. I knew that the fatal disease of Asiatic cholera had appeared in the city just as we were leaving. Taking counsel with Hummud, I removed my rug and saddle-bags to some distance to windward of the whole party, and pondered the wisest course. It would never do to go on in fellowship with fell disease, and perhaps be left a corpse in the middle of the desert. It might be equally fatal to return. Before midnight, however, I resolved on the latter course, and saddling my horse I was soon on the way back alone, bidding Hummud follow on the camel. A few hours sufficed to accomplish, at a trot and a gallop, the distance which, walking with a caravan, required nearly four days (absolutely forty-eight hours of locomotion) to master.

Arrived at the principal gate of the city of Bagdad, horse and man equally jaded, I was about to enter, when I found my ingress barred. The gate was closed, and from a wicket I was informed that the plague was in the town, and no one was permitted to enter until he had served twenty days' quarantine! Here was a situation—and on Christmas Day, too! It was in vain that I protested I was a friend of the resident's. Colonel Taylor had fled with his family to Busorah, and the Armenian substitute did not know me. I offered money—I made promises—all in vain. I was doomed to hold high festival in the desert with the hungry vultures hovering above me, rather offering them a scanty meal than getting one myself. As evening approached (for I had arrived at the western gate in the middle of the day) I began to feel very nervous and somewhat faint. No one went into the city, and those who came out bore with them the dead, all recent victims of the terrible visitation. It was clear I could have no hope of ingress, even if it were safe to be in the infected place. I at once resolved to abandon the poor camel, and putting my servant behind me, we rode down to the banks of the river (Tigris) and sought a boat. Not one was to be seen! The people had fled to Busorah in every available vessel. There were, however, we were told, some boats a few miles lower down the stream. We set off for the locality, but had not gone far before we came upon an encampment of Bedouins—thieves and murderers of the worst dye. With the keenness and rapidity of vultures, three or four of them, lance in

rest, rushed out to stop, and of course to rob me. Resistance, I knew, would be futile. There was only one escape: I turned my horse's head to the stream, then a few yards off, and putting spurs to his flanks, leaped in, and was soon floating down with the rapid current, which the Arabs appropriately enough call the *Djeer*, or javelin. The leap dislodged the faithful Hummud, and deposited him on the bank. Narrowly escaping the random shots of the Bedouins, and keeping close to the bank for an hour and a half, I was carried down to a little cane-built village, where my horse was brought up (nothing else could have stopped the poor wretch) by a cluster of boats. We got on to the bank, and were hospitably treated; and I then made arrangements for a trip to Busorah, after spending my Christmas holiday in the Tigris.

CHRISTMAS DAY IN A LAZARETTO.

In the winter of 1855, I had arrived at Odessa from Asiatic Turkey. The unlucky yellow flag, hoisted by command of the visiting surgeon of the port, compelled the brig I was in to toss about in the roadstead for a week before it was admitted to the mole or quarantine harbour. Then I was required to send my clothes for fumigation, and at the end of another week the authorities permitted me to land and take up my quarters in the lazaretto for fourteen days more, 'on suspicion of plague.'

The Odessa lazaretto is built in the form of a quadrangle. Each room is separated from its neighbour by a double wall, between which a sentinel takes his station, to see that neighbours hold no communication with each other. There is a small court-yard in front of each room; and a double iron grating—one row of grating a few feet before the other—keeps the prisoners from any personal tact with the outer world, represented by the restaurateur and his aids, the surgeon and the chaplain. In the room adjoining mine were confined a Greek and a young woman, who passed a portion of their time in singing to the music of a guitar, and occasionally a tambourine. Much of the rest was spent in eating, drinking, and sleeping, to judge from the long intervals of silence. But there were noisy episodes which conveyed strong proofs that the lady could scold as well as sing, and sometimes the quarrels rose to a terrible pitch, a thump, followed by a scream, furnishing the climax.

It was Christmas Day. The snow



fell heavily, deadening the sound of the church bells, which, through a broken pane, reminded me of the holy festival. I expected to hear my neighbours sing hymns. My own time was devoted to my books—the only relief to an enforced solitude. Towards evening, while the guard slept, I distinctly heard the voice of the man Greek. He seemed to be growling rather than speaking, and in the intervals of his silence I heard the female sob. Not a very 'merry Christmas,' thought I. Sometimes one voice rose above the other—the one was shrill, the other loud and angry. Then there was a scuffle, then all was tranquil. Night had fallen, and I had hoped the parties had gone to sleep. But again the murmurs, the expostulations, the outbursts, disturbed my quiet. And now the woman became voluble, and spasmodic bursts of grief alone interrupted the torrent of her eloquence. Ever and anon the man called out what appeared to be 'Silence!' adding a few words (none of which were distinct enough to be caught) in a minatory tone. Then came another struggle, words—bitter words—stifled cries, a heavy fall, a scream—silence again.

I could not sleep; what had been the issue of the last quarrel? Had the 'peace and good will' taught by the Redeemer, whose natal day the outer Christian world was celebrating, ultimately prevailed; and were the recent antagonists illustrating the Horatian maxim, that the falling out of lovers is the renewal of love? Or had the last fall so stunned the feeble of the two individuals as to render the revival of either love or anger temporarily impossible?

I was not long in doubt. It was past midnight, when I was awakened by dolorous cries and heavy sobs, vehement protestations and earnest apostrophes in the voice of the man. I knocked loudly at the wall to suggest silence. He evidently did not heed the knocking. I called out in good Italian, 'Be quiet; it was of no avail. I roused up the guard, and asked him what was the matter with the gentleman. My custodian suggested he was drunk. I could not, however, divest my mind of the idea that a deed of darkness had been perpetrated.

The night wore away. I could not sleep. I no longer heard the voice of the woman—even the man's voice was hushed; but, instead of the usual sounds, my ear was assailed with knockings on the floor, and a noise as of a saw or file

at work. When the restaurateur came round in the morning to take orders for breakfast, I told him what I had heard, and suggested that the lady might be ill, and need medical aid. He went next door, but was sent away with the intimation that nothing was wanted. Two or three more days elapsed: the time had arrived for my release. On the very day, indeed, when I was to be emancipated my neighbours were also to be freed. I heard the officers arrive next door. Some words were uttered, followed by an altercation; then the man cried bitterly. What could be the matter? More officers came; the man was fettered and taken away. Where was the woman? He had stabbed her in his anger; and, under some absurd notion that her existence would be forgotten by the authorities, he had taken up two planks, and deposited the dead body of the poor girl beneath them. This explained the operations which followed upon the silence. When I was released, I saw my quondam neighbour sitting in a verandah of the place where I went to reclaim my fumed and guarded by two soldiers. He was a little old man of malignant aspect. I remembered having seen him on the mole with a handsome young Greek whom I supposed to be his child. No one knew exactly what their relative position was. It was enough that he had shed her blood on Christmas Night.

A CHRISTMAS GALE.

It was in the African summer of 1826. We were rounding the Cape of Good Hope in the good ship 'Nancy Lee,' whereof James McCulloch was master, on our voyage from Bombay to Liverpool. I was the only passenger. The voyage had been tedious, for the bottom of the vessel was covered with barnacles, and the captain was not a very entertaining or instructive mariner. He did not smoke, because he feared it would destroy the *emmanuel* of his teeth; he hoped to be *enumerated* by his employers for certain extra duties he had performed; he thought sea-sickness was nothing when a man was *manured* to it, and so on. These malapropisms sufficiently illustrate the extent of his literary attainments. He had one mate, Smith by name, whose only diversion during the watch below was a daring attempt to conquer 'Life let us cherish' on a one-keyed flute. I was consequently cast upon my own resources. The table was not very luxuriantly supplied, but there was always a sufficiency; and on

Christmas Day we had an extra feast. The preserved salmon came in aid of the roast pork and plum-pudding, and some excellent claret was added to the usual vinous accompaniment. We dined at three o'clock. The weather was beautiful; all sail was set, and we were congratulating ourselves upon so propitious a 'double' of the terrible Cape of Storms. The captain had made liberal distribution of extra grog, and all went merrily. By five o'clock we had indulged in so many cheerful libations, and were, in fact, so very jolly, that we did not perceive that the wind had dropped to a calm; neither were we very sensible of a sudden change in the motion of the vessel until a heavy lurch to larboard sent bottles and glasses on to the deck of the cuddy. The captain looked up at the barometer over his head, turned deadly pale, and staggered out on to the quarter-deck. Mr. Smith was asleep on the poop; the crew, with the exception of one sick man, were drunk and quarrelling. The position was perilous in the extreme. Crack! and the main-royal with its yard and sail flapped against the top-gallant. The captain staggered to the halyards and called out, as loud as he could, 'Let go everything!' The wind became fiercer each moment; the jib was torn to shreds; the mizen-royal went; the vessel was almost on her beam ends. I rushed out, and aided the captain in 'letting go,' and went among the ship's company, to urge them to reef and furl and get down the shattered masts—all to no purpose. Only one or two were sufficiently in their senses to make an effort to do their duty. I jumped upon the poop, and shook Smith out of his lethargy. He stared, bewildered for some moments; and when he seemed to realise the condition of things, he began to bawl and use his whistle (for he was bos'n as well as mate), and wondered that no notice was taken of it. The sea had now risen considerably, and every now and then heavy seas dashed against the 'Nancy Lee,' or swept clean over her. By great efforts the 'letting go' had been accomplished, and every yard being loosened, the sails flopped about tremendously, breaking from their lifts and braces. The man at the helm, who ought to have been relieved two hours previously, now declared he could hold on no longer—the pressure upon the rudder was beyond his powers. He called for some comrade to take his place; he was unheeded.

So, in his desperation, he made the wheel fast, and went forward—only to drink his share of the liquor, which had been put into his keg for him. The captain was frenzied—he stamped, swore, prayed, invoked, ordered—all to no purpose. Out of a crew of fourteen, only four persons, myself included, were fit to do anything. The elements took advantage of our helplessness, and made terrible havoc with everything on and above deck. Happily, the hatches were hermetically closed, to protect the cargo. The foretopmast, unable to bear the strain, now went, and in its fall killed a sailor, who bore the rather inappropriate soubriquet of 'Happy Jack.' The men became frantic. One went up aloft to cut loose the main-royal, which still hung by some cordage to the lower stem. He got up with difficulty, and effected his purpose. The mast fell on the deck, and struck Mr. Smith; he staggered towards the gangway, and fell overboard. I screamed with affright and rushed to the side. A rope that hung below the main-chains had caught him as the vessel heeled over; but, instead of proving his salvation it aided his destruction, for I saw his poor body swinging to and fro, striking the ship's side with force enough to kill him if he had ten lives. To shorten the story, the gale slackened at midnight, and a dead calm rapidly ensued. We had then nothing but the rolling of the helpless ship to trouble us. But to what a miserable wreck was the full moon witness! If the awful struggle had sobered all hands, it was only to make them wish themselves drunk, for none could contemplate the frightful wreck which had resulted from the common indulgence without remorse. Every effort was now made to repair damages, but although two months more elapsed before we entered the Mercy, our condition was so dilapidated, that, in spite of the efforts made by the old skipper to tell a good story to his owners, they mulet him and the crew of all that was due, and resolved that, in future, no more such 'merry Christmases' should be passed by poor McCulloch in their service. He died a brokenhearted mariner, laying Smith's death to his own soul, and declaring that nothing on earth could 'enumerate' him for what he suffered. His long, hard life at sea had not 'manured' him to disasters which involved the lives of his shipmates.

THE OTHER MRS. JOHNSON.



JOHNSON was 'something in the City.' When we have said this much we have told pretty well all that even his most intimate acquaintances and neighbours knew of his commercial status. A close, uncommunicative little man was Johnson—one who never troubled himself about other folks' affairs, nor suffered others to busy themselves about his own. Not that there was any want of politeness in his manner, or anything rude or offensive in his reserve. He would chat in the most familiar way upon topics of general conversation; and his regular fellow-passengers by the morning steamboat considered him a remarkably pleasant fellow. Punctually, at a certain hour every morning, would Johnson embark at Lambeth Pier on the penny boat for London Bridge; and during the voyage he would, as we have said, converse in the most friendly fashion with the little knot of acquaintances on board—men who, punctual as himself, travelled every morning by the same conveyance, and so had almost come to know each other.

But only upon general matters would he so converse. However others might talk of their several business affairs, Johnson never alluded to his own; nor ever dropped the slightest hint that would indicate the branch of commerce in which he was engaged. Arrived at London Bridge, he would bid his fellow-passengers good morning; and then disappearing into one of the numerous narrow, tortuous streets that lead up from the river to the Bank, would be seen by them no more until they met again on board the boat the following morning.

Nor were his own immediate neighbours any more enlightened as to Johnson's business. Johnson was no recluse, avoiding the society of his fellow-men. On the contrary, the same agreeable companion that he was on board the penny boat in the morning, he also was among his neighbours when he returned from business in the evening. Johnson resided in a small, but thoroughly 'genteel' street, not far from the Westminster Road, and in close proximity to

those 'Buildings' which, for some inscrutable reason or other, are associated with the name of Hercules. In the undoubtedly 'genteel' parlour, of the decidedly 'genteel' tavern at the corner of the street, Johnson would every evening enjoy the society of a most select gathering of the neighbouring tradesmen. Here, he would every evening arrive with the same punctuality that marked his appearance in the morning on the pier; would go straight to his regular seat in one particular corner of the room; would smoke one pipe, and drink one glass of the very mildest ale, and precisely as the clock struck ten take his departure. Still, even here his companions knew nothing more of Johnson than that he paid his way regularly, and was 'something in the City.' The nearest approach that had ever been made to an attempt to question Johnson upon business matters was made one evening by the landlord. A temporary lull in the conversation having occurred, the landlord turned abruptly to him, and asked—

'How are things in the City, sir, to-day?'

Johnson replied, briefly, that he believed money was somewhat tighter; and that the Bank of England had raised the minimum rate of discount; and then, although it wanted full twenty minutes of his usual time, he left the room.

'You know he don't like talking shop,' remonstrated the butcher from next door.

The baker from round the corner thought it was very odd he never could be got to say what he was; but, for his own part, he fancied Johnson must be 'something on the Stock Exchange.'

The landlord suggested he might be 'something in some bank or other;' and so the matter was left.

Even the few intimate friends who visited at Johnson's house knew very little more. Mrs. Johnson did now and then have a few neighbours in to tea; and occasionally went out to tea herself; but the utmost anybody had ever learned from her, even in her most confidential moments, was that Johnson was engaged in getting up a company in the City; and, until it was all settled, he didn't care to talk about it. As to what the company was to be, she really scarce knew herself, for she never liked to interfere in business matters.

In saying this, poor little Mrs. Johnson scarcely exaggerated her own ignorance. Her husband had, of course, informed her of the name of the company with which he was connected; and she

knew it had something to do with sugar. But what his precise position in connection with it was she was unaware. Once or twice, when she happened to be going into the neighbourhood of the City, she had proposed that she should call at the office and accompany him home. This, however, he invariably opposed. He had no idea, he said, of women interfering with business. As for a woman fetching her husband from his office, it was perfectly ridiculous. He would not hear of it. He must request of her never to intrude upon his business hours at the office.

His wife—they were, as yet, only in their second year of wedlock, and wives (at first) are apt to place implicit faith in the superior judgment of their lords and masters—supposed he must be right. Possibly her presence at his office might distract his thoughts from business. Possibly, too, affairs were not over flourishing just now with his company, and he would not like her to be witness of any difficulties he might have to contend with. The housekeeping money he supplied her with, though regular as the sun itself in its coming, could hardly be called plentiful. His business obviously was not as yet a flourishing one. Probably at his office he had to undergo worse difficulties than they had at home, and he would rather spare her the spectacle of his hard struggles. At any rate, he did not wish to see her at his place of business; that was enough for her—the more especially as she found herself quite sufficiently occupied with Baby, who was now 'beginning to take notice, in a way that was really wonderful for his age.'

So Johnson's office in the City remained a *terra incognita* to his good little wife.

And now, shall we be deemed guilty of taking an undue advantage of the author's privilege of peeping behind the scenes—of knowing all about the thoughts and motives of the characters—if we divulge the secret which Johnson kept so assiduously from his nearest friends, even, in a great measure, from his own wife? The truth may as well come out at once. Johnson had a weakness—a pardonable one, perhaps some would call it; while others would pronounce it despicable—at any rate, he had a weakness. He did not care that his acquaintances, or even this loving little wife of his, should know how very humble was his real position. He had first met her three seasons ago at Brighton, where he had chanced to go by an excursion train, at a time when

his prospects were decidedly better than at present. He had then made no secret of his position in life—which was that of managing clerk to a large City firm, in which he had every chance of some day rising to a partnership. Since he had married, however, the large City firm had come to grief, and had appeared in the columns of that highly respectable, semi-weekly newspaper, of which her most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria is sole proprietor, which is published every Tuesday and Friday, and which is called the 'Gazette.' Johnson had subsequently got engaged upon the new Sugar-Cane and Molasses Company (Limited), now just struggling for existence. But he did not care to tell his own wife, even, still less his mere acquaintances, that his connection with that company was only that of a clerk at thirty shillings a week. So he maintained this mystery about his City business to his ordinary acquaintances, while he restrained his wife from calling on him at his City office.

But Christmas comes but once a year; and, as everybody knows who has ever read anything more sentimental than an almanac, the 25th of December is a day on which the domestic virtues and home affections hold high festival. At Christmas time the various members of families unite, and perform all sorts of mystic rites over wassail-bowls, cans of egg-flip, bowls of bishop, tankards of mulled claret, and what not. So, considering the genial influences of the season, we can scarce blame Mrs. Johnson for that, finding herself on Christmas Eve in the immediate vicinity of her husband's office, she so far forgot her liege lord's general orders as to determine that she would just this once call in, and bring him home with her.

His office was No. 56 in the very street, the corner of which she was now passing. The corner house itself, opposite which she paused, bore for its number 48. Her husband was then but eight doors off. Only the frontages of eight narrow houses separated her from her dear Johnson. Was it likely she could pass on without walking just the distance of these eight doors out of her way to see him? And upon Christmas Eve, too!

Mrs. Johnson turned down the street, and, having come to No. 56, she entered. A strange, uncomfortable feeling seemed to take possession of her as she did so—a feeling that she was in some way an intruder, was trespassing on forbidden ground; and as she mounted the inhospitable, unfamiliar stone steps that led to the offices above, she could

scarcely overcome a feeling of downright desolation, as she reflected how utter a stranger she was in this place, where her husband passed the greater part of his daily existence.

She reached the first floor, upon which she had some recollection of having heard her husband say his office was situated; but she looked round in vain for any reference either to Johnson or to Sugar-canes and Molasses. There were several doors upon the landing, but all bore unfamiliar names. All but one; and that had upon it simply a smudge of whitey-brown paint, blotting out whatever name had been there before. She was about giving up the search as hopeless, when her eye fell upon a strange hieroglyphic figure, which persons of an imaginative turn of mind might take for the representation of a human hand, with the forefinger pointing up the next flight of stairs. Upon the wall, close adjoining this anatomically impossible hand, were inscribed the words 'Johnson & Co.'

Upstairs accordingly she went; and knocking timidly at the office-door which bore her husband's name, was invited to enter.

She found herself in a handsomely carpeted, handsomely furnished room—more handsomely furnished, it appeared to her, than Johnson's business could either require or afford. Yet, doubtless, he knew best. In getting up a public company it might be necessary to make a show at any sacrifice. However this might be, she could not help mentally contrasting that splendid Brussels carpet, with the felt druggist that adorned their best parlour at home; and the comparison was decidedly not in favour of the druggist.

The sole occupant of the office was a slim, wiry youth, or boy, or man—for he might have been any of age, from fifteen to five-and-twenty—whose bright red hair and keen, cunning, sparkling eyes irresistibly suggested the notion of a fox.

'Was Mr. Johnson in?' she asked the foxy-looking clerk.

No, he was not. But would she wait half a second, please? What name?

But Mrs. Johnson would not give her name. She had—silly little creature that she was—felt an indescribable relief on hearing that her husband was not upon the premises. The moment she had seen that elegantly-appointed office, so unlike what she had pictured it to herself, she had repented the rash step she had taken in intruding there, in opposition to his express wish. She felt very much as poor Mrs. Bluebeard

must have felt on first viewing the forbidden interior of the Blue Chamber. What she now saw was less horrible than the sight that had met that lady's eyes; but it was none the less one forbidden by her husband. Therefore she would rather he should not know she had been there. So she made some blundering speech, to the effect that her business was not of the slightest consequence; and that she would perhaps call again. (A 'fib' and she knew it. Once safe away from there, she would never come again without her husband's sanction.) And so, with more blundering apologies to the red-haired clerk for having disturbed him, she tried to make her way out at the door.

But this young gentleman would not hear of it. In the politest manner possible, but with a firmness far beyond his years (whatever they might have numbered), he requested her to be seated, 'Just for half a second.'

Of course, it would be preposterous to refuse waiting for the infinitesimal portion of time, although perhaps accurately speaking it might be difficult even to take a seat in the allotted period. Mrs. Johnson did not wish it to be thought that she absolutely ran away from her husband's office, much as she inwardly regretted having come there at all. So she consented to sit down for half a second.

The foxy-looking clerk disappeared through a door marked 'Private.' The half second that he was absent proved a long one. So long indeed that if there be any truth in the multiplication table, human life made up of such half seconds would, with its threescore years and ten, utterly eclipse the longevity of the patriarchs before the flood. Long enough, amongst other things, was the half second that she waited, for Mrs. Johnson to overhear from the inner office to which her husband's clerk had retreated, a shrill and unmistakably female voice exclaim—

'Wants to see Mr. Johnson, and will give no name! Bring her in here to me!'

What could this mean? Who could be the owner of this shrill female voice, that seemed to speak with such authority? Poor little Mrs. Johnson regretted more and more that she had disobeyed her husband by calling at his office. She felt very miserable and uncomfortable altogether, and would have given anything could she have got away unquestioned from the spot.

At this moment, however, the foxy-looking clerk made his reappearance, and requested she would step into the

private office for half a second. (Half a second seemed to be his notion of the amount of time required for most things.) Would she step in for half a second?

No; she thanked him. She would rather not. Her business was not of the slightest consequence. And she fancied she had heard a lady's voice.

The foxy-looking one replied—

'Yes; it is Mrs. Johnson!'

'WHO?'

'Mrs. Johnson! Eh? Why, what's the matter, ma'am? You seem taken queer all at once. Take a chair, ma'am, for half a second.'

'Oh, no, no!' cried the poor little woman, bursting into tears. 'There's some mistake. Do let me go now, please.'

She was moving towards the outer door, and the foxy one, by way of remonstrance, was about to suggest the propriety of reflecting upon matters for his favourite length of time, when the door of the inner office once more opened.

A lady of commanding presence made her appearance: a lady above the average height, and decidedly beyond the average circumference, even in the present ultra-crinoline age: a lady wearing a magnificent and amply distended dress of purple *moire antique*, surmounted by a black velvet jacket trimmed with real sable: a lady with a massive gold chain affixed to a gold watch considerably larger than the usual run of lady's watches, and worn outside her jacket at her waist: a lady with a profusion of valuable rings adorning her somewhat extensive hands, and of other jewellery adorning her somewhat extensive person generally. All this poor little Mrs. Johnson was able to perceive at a glance, even in the midst of her confusion and distress. Indeed, she would have been no true woman had she not. We verily believe if there were female members of the police force, and one such were to arrest a criminal of her own sex, even upon the gravest charge, the culprit, before thinking of her own defence or answer to the accusation, would manage to 'take stock' of what her captor was dressed in.

The gorgeously-attired female having gazed fixedly at our friend Mrs. Johnson, for a brief space of time (for 'about half a second' would doubtless have been the deposition of the foxy-looking clerk, had he been called as a witness in the matter), and finding that lady not inclined to open the conversation, or indeed do anything but shed tears and tremble, begged to inquire what her business might be, adding that anything she might have to say to Mr.

Johnson could be just as well told to her. Would the lady be good enough to step into the inner office—

'For half a second,' instigated the foxy one in a parenthesis.

Mrs. Johnson cried afresh, and begged they would let her go home. She was sure there was some mistake. She was so sorry she had intruded.

The lady in the *moire antique*, and the big watch-chain, aided by the foxy-looking clerk, however, managed to get our poor little friend in through that door marked 'Private.'

If Mrs. Johnson had been struck by the unexpected elegance with which the outer office was furnished, she was positively bewildered by the profusion she now witnessed in the little room in which she found herself cloistered with this unknown lady. Pictures not only covered every available portion of the walls, but were piled in heaps upon the floor all round the room. Odd trinkets, knick-knacks, silver plate, and articles of *certu* were heaped upon side tables, until the whole place looked like a broker's warehouse. There was, in fact, only just space to walk among the accumulated valuables to the small writing table which occupied the centre of the apartment, and which had two chairs placed, one at each side of it. To one of these chairs the strange dashing lady motioned Mrs. Johnson, while she sat herself upon the other. And on the table by the chair where the strange lady sat there was some Berlin wool work (of an unusually large and glaring pattern), which she had obviously just laid down. Behind her chair her bonnet and shawl were hanging against the wall.

'Now, madam,' she commenced, as soon as they were alone, 'May I inquire what your business is with Mr. Johnson?'

'Oh, I am sure it's all some terrible mistake,' sobbed out Mrs. Johnson. 'It was so silly of me to come—when he always begged me never to intrude upon him at his office.'

'Did he, indeed?' replied the other. 'And may I ask the nature of your acquaintance with Mr. Johnson?'

'Acquaintance!' she exclaimed in astonishment, (she forgot for the moment she had declined to give her name).

'Acquaintance! I am his wife!'

'His what?'

'His wife.' She had shaken off her weeping deprecatory manner now, aroused by an expression on her companion's face, of something very like contempt. And now the little woman asserted herself bravely.

'So!' cried the magnificent one, 'it is you, is it, with your mincing wax-doll face, that has been the cause of his neglecting me as he has done!'

'Neglecting you? What do you mean, madam? I repeat, I am Mrs. Johnson.'

'Pooh!' exclaimed the other. 'Don't talk to me. I have found you at last. I knew I should. And so Mr. Johnson forbade you coming here, did he? He knew that I should be here to meet you if you did come. And you have disobeyed him at last. Well, madam, I am glad to see you.'

'What do you mean?' cried Mrs. Johnson, starting from her seat. 'Who are you?'

'The unfortunate but lawful wife of the base man you call your husband,' replied the other coldly.

'You?'

'I.'

'Tis false,' cried Mrs. Johnson.

'Is it?' retorted her gorgeously attired companion, as she pressed down the knob of a spring-bell which stood close at her hand.

We should be sorry to accuse the foxy-looking clerk of having been listening at the key hole; but he certainly could not have answered the summons of that bell more rapidly, if he had had his hand upon the lock already. On this occasion his own estimate of the amount of time required for various actions was strictly true. It was literally not more than half a second from the bell striking to his entering the room.

'Skillet,' said his mistress, addressing the foxy-looking one—'request the housekeeper to step down to me.'

Mr. Skillet—for such it seemed was the name of the red-headed clerk—disappeared in about the space of time he was so prone to talk about.

The two rival claimants to the title of Mrs. Johnson stood eyeing one another, each with an expression of fierce disdain—although on the part of her whom for distinction we must call our Mrs. Johnson, the disdain was of a tearful, alarmed, wondering kind; while on the other Mrs. Johnson's face it was haughty, triumphant, and contemptuous.

Mr. Skillet soon returned accompanied by the housekeeper, whom he had fetched from her secluded dwelling in the attics. She was dressed in a gown of rusty black merino, and wore a widow's cap which had evidently seen better days. In manner, she was grave and sedate, as befitted one for whom the bustle and turmoil of life was over, and who had long since settled down re-



THE OTHER MRS. JOHNSON.

Designed by George Du Maurier

signedly into the care of offices. She courted deferentially to the lady whom we have designated the 'other' Mrs. Johnson, while on 'our' Mrs. Johnson, she fixed an inquiring stare.

'I want you, madam, if you please,' said the other Mrs. Johnson, 'to inform this person—we will say, if you please, this lady—whether or not I am the wife of Mr. Johnson, who rents this office from your master.'

'Which certainly you are, mum,' responded the housekeeper. 'Leastways, I can't say as I've seen your marriage-lines. But since you've been in the habit of coming here every day, your good gentleman has always spoke of you to me as his good lady.'

'She comes here daily!' cried our Mrs. Johnson in dismay.

'Which I hope, mum,' remarked the housekeeper, turning to her, 'I hope you won't be coming here to disturb the gentlemen as has the other offices, with anything like what I may call obstreperousness. They've always been kept respectable—these offices have.'

'The other offices!' cried our Mrs. Johnson—a ray of hope seeming for a moment to illuminate the dark mystery. 'Tell me, is it possible, there is some other Mr. Johnson, having an office in these premises?'

'None, mum,' replied the housekeeper. 'Leastways, there hasn't been since I've had care of the place, which is five years come Lady Day.'

'And this is No. 56?' asked our Mrs. Johnson.

'This, mum, is No. 56!'

'And there is no other of the name,' interposed the other—the sumptuously attired Mrs. Johnson, 'than my husband.'

'None, mum. Leastways, unless the party as has just taken the office on the first floor answers to the name. But they don't take possession till the day after to-morrow, and they hasn't got their name writ up as yet. So you see there's no knowing.'

But this was quite enough for our Mrs. Johnson. Her Johnson was neither one of an extinct genus of the ante-present-housekeeper period, nor a new tenant to come in in the future. He was located there now. And in his office—the office of the only Johnson on the premises—she had found a woman who not only claimed herself to be, but was acknowledged by the respectable widow who had charge of the establishment, to be Mrs. Johnson!

This then was the reason why he had forbidden her coming to his City office. Office, did she say? Rather a sumptuous boudoir, in which he spent his

days in the society of this gorgeous female, leaving his lawful wife to slave at home in poverty.

The gorgeous female smiled in wicked triumph on the unhappy little woman, and asked her whether she was satisfied, or whether she would like to wait till Mr. Johnson came?

'Oh, no, no; not for the world!' cried the poor little wife. 'No earthly consideration should induce me to remain in this dreadful place, or ever to darken its doors again. But you may tell Johnson, if you see him—as I have no doubt you will—that—that I could never have believed it of him!'

And bursting afresh into tears, she made a most undignified retreat from that sumptuously furnished apartment, and hurried rapidly down the stairs.

'Skillet,' said the gorgeous one, directly she had gone, 'follow that person, and bring me word where she goes to.'

Skillet of the foxy aspect, snatched up his hat, and followed in pursuit, with an unquestioning alacrity which seemed to imply that he was not unaccustomed to such or similar errands.

Johnson did not appear that evening at his usual time and place in that highly respectable hostelry at the corner of the street in which he lived. The other regular frequenters of the place thought it was strange—extremely strange! He who was as punctual as the clock itself in his time of coming and quitting them. Surely there must be 'something up!'

The baker from round the corner couldn't tell what to make of it.

The butcher from next door, looking very mysteriously at the others across the bowl of his pipe, declared his belief that he could tell 'em summ'at as would astonish 'em a bit if he chose, only it was no business of his, and he didn't like interfering with his neighbours' affairs.

This affectation of an inclination to be secret, however, deceived no one. It was plain the butcher was bursting to tell all he knew. So it required very little pressing to get out of him that he had seen Mrs. Johnson, not more than a couple of hours since, get into a cab with a lot of boxes, and the baby with her; and though her veil was down, he was quite certain she was crying; and moreover, that the girl that was in the habit of coming daily to help in the work of the house was crying too, as she saw Mrs. Johnson to the cab; and by the way in which she bade

her mistress good-bye, he felt sure that lady was gone away 'for good and all.' What did they think of that, now?

Leaving the assembled gossips to make what they could out of the butcher's statement, we will avail ourselves of our privilege of taking a look into Johnson's home itself.

Johnson arrived home on that Christmas Eve at his usual time; in fact Johnson always did everything at his usual time. He came provided with a mysterious bottle in one of his coat pockets, and a paper bag containing half a dozen eggs in his hand—undoubted indications of Johnson's intention to celebrate the eve of Christmas with the orthodox 'flip.' Altogether, Johnson was in a merry genial mood, thoroughly fitted to the season.

The door was opened for him, not by his wife, as he expected, but by the apology for a housemaid, the girl before alluded to. This was strange, Johnson thought; but still more strange, he observed the girl was weeping—no, that is too weak a term, was absolutely blubbering; more strange even than this, she handed him, without speaking, a letter, in the superscription of which he recognised the handwriting of his wife.

Strangest of all was what he found inside that letter:—

'You have deceived me. I know all. I have found out the real reason why you have always so positively prohibited my calling at your office in the City. I have gone to mamma at Brighton. It will be in vain for you to attempt to follow me. After your deceit, I will not see you.'

What could this mean? Even if she had discovered his very humble position (how she had found it out he could form no idea), still his deception in keeping it from her, for her own comfort's sake, was surely no such enormous crime. It certainly did not warrant such a remarkably strong measure of retaliation as this desertion of him. What should he do? Her letter said it was in vain for him to attempt to follow her to Brighton. Of that fact he was painfully aware already; for truth to tell, he had not about him at the moment sufficient ready money to enable him to do so, had he resolved upon that step (and railway companies will not, however urgent the occasion, give tickets upon credit). He could, no doubt, have borrowed the amount. But how could he tell any one his wife had left him—and for a cause so utterly absurd? How could he ever have the slightest claim to respectability hereafter, if it were known his home had

been made desolate because Mrs. Johnson had found out he was not a City merchant or speculator, but only a clerk at thirty shillings weekly wages?

Utterly bewildered as he was by the blow, so unexpected, so impossible to occur (as it would have seemed to him if prophesied), Johnson felt that there was literally nothing to be done. He immediately dismissed the girl from further attendance for the evening, sorrowfully laid aside the bottle and the bag of eggs he had provided for spending a jolly Christmas Eve, and went lonely, despairing, hopeless, joyless, and egg-flipless to bed.

The sun rose bright upon the Christmas morning; a sharp, clear, crisp, frosty morning; a Christmas of the good old sort; a truly English Christmas; and the church bells rang merrily in honour of the day. And everywhere friends meeting friends were wishing one another 'A merry Christmas and a happy New Year!'

But Johnson, rising from his troubled slumbers unrefreshed, felt nothing of these genial seasonable influences. The Christmas morning might be clear and crisp, and of the good old English sort. For Johnson it was only miserably cold. For him the church bells rang out discords harshly jangling out of time. For him there was no friendly grasp of hand; no kindly wishes of the season. Nothing but solitude; dreary, cheerless, joyless solitude.

He came down stairs. The grates which should have been glowing with a Christmas blaze, were cold and black. The bottle and the bag of eggs standing where he had left them overnight seemed to reproach him with what Christmas Eve should have been. And what is this hideous compound that he finds in a basin covered with a cloth? A chaotic mass of an unwholesome-looking yellowish drab mixture; something that might be taken for some new-invented mortar, but for those darker coloured spots pervading it, which Johnson on investigation finds out to be raisins! Spirit of Christmas! is it possible? This unsightly mass turns out to be the uncooked pudding! The Christmas pudding! The magnum opus of the twelvemonth's cookery! The delicious sphere about which cluster metaphorically all the year's loving domesticity, and prosaically all the toothsome anticipations of a good Christmas dinner. The Christmas pudding! so splendid in its appearance in due course upon the table! How loathsome does it look in uncooked deshabille!

Under existing circumstances we need hardly say that Johnson did not care to boil that pudding. The present age has witnessed the birth of many heresies, and abundant flying in the face of old beliefs and traditions. But we are happy to believe that cooking a Christmas pudding for oneself, to be guzzled in unsocial solitude would imply a degree of depravity at which the world has not yet arrived.

Still, however depressed and overwhelmed the mind, man must have food. So Johnson, having, after a good hour spent in trying to light a fire, and another hour in watching for the kettle's boiling, made himself a cup of wretchedly bad tea, took his solitary breakfast—after a fashion; washed up his single cup and saucer; and then sat down to think how he should spend the day—his Christmas Day!

There are some problems which resolve themselves; and it is quite possible to debate in our own mind how time should be disposed of, until we find the question answered for us and the time already spent. So it was nearly noon, and Johnson had not yet made up his mind what he should do upon his lonely Christmas Day, when he was startled by a cab drawing up to his door, and still more startled on seeing emerge from that cab a buxom, smiling, kindly-looking personage in whom he at once recognised Mrs. Johnson's mother. He was by no means so much startled after this, when, having rushed to the door and admitted his good mother-in-law, another figure, that of his runaway wife, followed, with Baby in her arms.

Mrs Johnson seemed scarcely to dare look at her husband, as she followed her mother into the best parlour.

The old lady seated herself in a chair as though determined to make herself at home; and then, utterly regardless of Johnson's presence, proceeded to take off her bonnet; this done, she raised the skirt of her dress, and produced from some mysterious hiding-place or other, a cap of such wondrously elaborate structure, that how it could have survived the railway journey without so much as being crushed appeared a downright mystery. She adjusted her cap before the chimney-glass, and then sat down again prepared for anything.

'And now then,' said the old lady, looking across to where Johnson stood regarding her and his wife by turns with an odd, puzzled look. 'Now then, let us have it out. This silly girl of mine came home last night with an absurd story—I scarce know what—of

your having some other lady-love concealed in the unknown regions of the City.'

'I!' exclaimed Johnson, in astonishment.

'Don't interrupt me,' continued the old lady. 'I said to the stupid child, "Mary Jane, my dear, I don't believe it. But, right or wrong, I will take you back and see about it. To-morrow, my dear, is Christmas Day, when no wife should, under any circumstances, be away from her husband's home. "In fact," the old lady added by way of parenthesis, "if I were not myself a widow, I would not have come with her, even on this occasion." So we packed ourselves off by the first train this morning, and here we are.'

'Why, Mary Jane,' cried Johnson, as soon as the old lady allowed him a chance of getting in a word. 'What have you been dreaming about? I a lady-love in the City?'

Then Mrs. Johnson told him all. Her disobeying his commands; her calling at his office; and her interview with the gorgeous female. All, precisely as we have already told the reader.

'Eh! Then, by Jove!' cried Johnson, smiling in spite of himself, 'you've been to the office of old Johnson, the bill-discounter, on the second floor. A pretty sort of Christmas he'll spend to-day! His wife's as jealous as a hippopotamus, and goes there daily to witness his interviews with his female clients.'

'What!' exclaimed Mrs. Johnson, much relieved. 'It was then not your office that I went to? Yet stay,' she added, 'they distinctly told me there was not another Johnson on the premises.'

'Nor is there,' replied her husband; 'and in this fact lies all with which I feel I have to reproach myself. While in that building I am no Johnson. Hear me, Mary Jane, and pardon my silly pride. When I met my recent pecuniary reverses, and had to put up with a very much inferior position, I did not like that my name which had previously stood so well in the City should be degraded; so I—'

'Don't say you took another name,' interrupted his wife. 'It sounds so base—so like a swindler. Don't say you took another name.'

'I did not,' answered Johnson, 'but instead, I dispensed with a portion of that which was mine by right; and the individual who was formerly known as Hamilton Johnson, Esq., became, when forced to accept the situation of clerk and messenger at a poor thirty-shilling

salary, plain Mr. Hamilton. So, my dear girl, believe me when I tell you that the one sole reason of my opposing your calling at my office in the City, was that I had no office of my own for you to call at.

Mrs. Johnson threw herself into her husband's arms. We will not attempt to enter into details of what she said to him—this husband of hers, who, while she thought he had been deceiving her, had only planned, and schemed, and plotted to save her from anxiety or worry; of what she thought of him, how proud she was of him, or of how she implored forgiveness for her doubts.

But how did it happen, possibly the reader may inquire, that Mrs. Johnson had not found out the office of the company in whose service Johnson held this subordinate position?

Good reader, please remember Christmas is not only a great home festival; it is also one of the legal quarter days. The great Sugar-cane and Molasses Company (limited) not finding their shares go off with the rapidity that had been anticipated, had given up the expensive offices they had hitherto occupied. This Company's name it was that had just been obliterated by the smudge of whitey-brown paint that Mrs. Johnson had observed the previous day on the first floor of No. 56.

And now, once more, a cab draws up at Johnson's door, and again therefrom alights a female. Mrs. Johnson, peeping over the blind, is utterly bewildered as she recognises in the new arrival

The other Mrs. Johnson!

(The fuxy-looking clerk had executed his commission thoroughly, and had dogged the steps of our Mrs. Johnson to her home.)

She went herself to the door to admit the other Mrs. Johnson.

'So madam,' said the gorgeous one, 'I am glad to see you in your own home. I confess I was somewhat curious to learn where and what your home might be. And after the very affectionate interest you expressed yesterday in my husband, common civility demanded that I should return your call. I am here, as you perceive.'

'Madam,' said Johnson, interposing, 'through a strange series of mistakes, my wife yesterday called at your husband's office, believing it to be mine. I hope you will forgive her.'

The appearance on the scene of a Johnson, who was not *her* Johnson, somewhat staggered the preconceived opinions of the gorgeous one. She instituted all sorts of inquiries into the

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minutest details of the circumstances which had led to the error; and being at length thoroughly convinced that her jealousy, at any rate in this quarter, was as groundless as it was ridiculous, it became her turn now to ask forgiveness.

She was assured that she was thoroughly forgiven—that no one held her answerable for the circumstances that had occurred.

But would the lady she had so wrongfully suspected do her the great favour of accompanying her home? She had had a terrible scene that morning with her husband; and though she had no right to ask such a boon, might she hope that the lady would come with her to be witness of her penitence? Nay; if she might, after her conduct yesterday, suggest such a thing, dared she hope Mr. Johnson too, and the lady to whom she had not had the honour of an introduction, would dine with them that day?

The lady to whom the gorgeous one had not been introduced, and who we need not say was our Mrs. Johnson's mother, declared it to be her conviction that as the absurd conduct of the other Mrs. Johnson had been the cause of their having no Christmas dinner ready there, the very best thing they could do was to accept the invitation. (Our Mrs. Johnson's mamma had always been noted for shrewd common sense.)

So after considerable discussion it was decided that the whole party should proceed to dine at the house of old Johnson the bill-discounter.

The party was duly introduced by the mistress of the house; and all the perplexing circumstances of the day before having been thoroughly explained, the two Johnsons and their two wives spent a regularly merry Christmas.

Old Johnson the bill-discounter, indeed, spite of his reputation as a hard grasping man in business, turned out to be a trump in his own house. Hearing of the humble position his newly-made acquaintance was compelled to occupy down in the City, he declared his intention of employing his own influence to get him a considerably better engagement in another quarter.

The bill-discounting Johnson was as good as his word, and both found reason to bless the day they had been brought together. The sweet simple domesticity of the good little woman whom we have from the first claimed as 'ours,' had a magical influence in banishing the ridiculous doubts and jealousies of her friend, and altogether in bringing to a more healthy, rational frame of mind, 'the other Mrs. Johnson.'

W. B.

*G

A CHRISTMAS MEDLEY.



Drawn by Alfred W. Cooper.

PRAY pardon, Aunt Janet! Ah! what shall I say
To excuse this unfortunate hamper's delay?

It is always the way

If I'm absent a day,

I might just as well be at Hong Kong or Bombay.
All was ready; the one only question was whether
A crate could be found to pack all well together.

To our German factotum I turned. He said, 'Ja,'
He had found an old hamper directed to Ma.

Delighted, I wrote on the blank side the card

Paid, to Miss Janet Twistleton—care of the guard.

Then off, dear, I flew

With Miss Annie Carew

To stay for a week, and become very blue.

(Miss Annie I beg

To say is an authoress, yet in the egg.)

Now how shall I tell you? I am so concerned:

Alas, for my packing—the card had got turned!

In a moment the children were down on their knees,

And up to their elbows in fruit and cream cheese;

While, scattered around them, alas! 'tis too true,

Lay the preserves and patties intended for you:

All my labours undone

(Which these urchins called 'fun')!

All the ducks I had stuffed, all the turkeys I'd crammed,
All the lemons I'd squeezed, all the jellies I'd jammed
Into spaces so small
That one hamper held all,
Spread abroad would at least have filled Exeter Hall.

To redeem this sad error, dear, darling old Janet,
I send you four pheasants, two hares, and a gannet :
Some few things beside
In which I take pride,
Mere trifles, however, scarce worthy of mention ;
Small tokens of love. But now pray attention.



Drawn by G. A. Doyle.

Just one word to that sad madcap cousin of mine
(I am really too busy to write him a line :
Quite enough to get through are his letters to me),
Tell Charlie I send him, per P. D. Q.,
A watchguard unique—quite entirely *per se*,
Of my own hair, enwove in a plaiting of three,
In return for—oh, well, never mind, he'll remember—
A trifle he gave me to keep last December.
To sharpen his wits, ere I finished to pack,
I thought I'd pop in just one small nut to crack,
No more and no less,
In the form of a riddle, my last and my first.
Can you tell—can he guess,
Why the rose-plants he sent me in sorrow were nursed?

If he says I wept over them tell him he lies
 Under error, in judging the state of my eyes.
 The thing's not so bad, though so sad it appears,
 For, placed row above row, they were watered in tiers.



Drawn by Kenny Meadows.

Does Charlie remember our last Christmas Eve?
 How we two started off, without license or leave,
 To dear Uncle Percy's,
 Where slow as a bear's is
 The flow of existence—the stream-wave of life,
 And beguiled him with pastime
 Sweet as the last time
 He danced little children and dreamed of a wife?
 When we called in the maimed, who were stricken—in years,
 And the blind—those whom sorrow had blinded with tears,
 And the halt, who had halted, struck back by their fears
 (The poor, mateless throng who have no little dears)?
 When we'd forfeits and songs,
 With pokers and tongs;
 Then, home through a down-feathered snow-storm at last,
 To the sound of the village band, tabor and fife?
 Oh, my uncle's old coachman, the look that he cast
 When mad Charlie cried out, 'Phil, don't pray drive so fast!'

And if he made mirth o' us was he not right?
 'Twas the old man's share of the merry Yule night.
 Perhaps he remembered
 His May-time of youth,
 Its frolic—its truth,
 Ere his days were Decemb'ered.
 So we joined in the laugh. Who could give the cold shoulder
 To a man half as old as Methuselah, or older?
 Or rather,
 Why do we not say 'as Methuselah's father?'
 Nay, aunt, you may smile; but, when all's said and done,
 He was a little older, I conclude, than his son.



Drawn by Wm. McConnell.

And has he forgotten the ramble we took
 That glad Christmas morn through court, alley, and nook
 Where the great city sits,
 To the great city baker's who bakes the tit-bits?
 What squeezing, what crushing! What crowds there were there,
 All clatter, mirth, mischief, gape, giggle, and stare;

To gossip, to tattle, to question, and see
 What the sum of a poor man's dinner might be.
 'Twas a Christmas Day's dinner to make the heart ache;
 It was nothing on earth but a battered beefsteak!
 That crucial fact in its horror to know,
 You had only to peer down the regions below
 Where they sound the roll-call till the dark depths are stirred,
 And not a soul answers—nor a roll

That I heard.

Thus when, fresh from Christ's Hospital, rude as a true boy,
 A long-coated, quaint, yellow-web footed Blue boy,
 Who quacked like a duckling and dived like a duck,
 With his muffin-cap burrowing deep as a mole,
 For the first time beholding the poor man's pot-luck
 At the top of his voice shrieked—a 'Toad-in-a-hole!'

At that terrible word

Up from out the dark cave—like that strange hibernator,
 That sleepest, oddest of all things in nature—
 Rose the baker's man, white as the ghost of a baker,
 But sulky and black as an undertaker,
 Or his highness below when he lights on a Quaker;

Indignant and sour,

Ghastly and grim,

With all his good-humour quite nipped in the flour,
 For he thought 'twas a nickname invented for him!

Now, through the lodge gates,

Hark! slow wind the waits.

Like a strange broken link,

How broken we know not,

From the chain of the joy-woven blossoms immortal,

The blossoms we grow not,

Borne down by the sighs

Of the sorrowful, tremulous wind as it flies

Dropped in love from the brink

Of the heavenly portal—

Like a rainbow, broad-arched, spanning ocean and shore,

With its crown to the crown of the heavens evermore,

Bringing tidings of peace home to every man's door;

Music breathes of the skies;

I can trifle no more.

The airs may be hackneyed, the words may seem small,

The soul can transmute them; sweet fancy is all,

That child of eternity, saved from the Fall!

Earth to-night is transfigured, and holy the ground,

And the hour lends a rapture transcending the sound.

They sing of the 'angels' 'fair' ever and 'bright,'

And see! where Orion stands belted for flight,

Not for conquest, nor wealth, nor for fame, nor delight,

But for victory won

Over ill that is done

In God's sight,

Over the bars

Of the restless-eyed, heaven-tied, earth-denied stars

A star-angel floats down a ladder of light!

Like the moon when she glides down some sea-watered bay

Where ripple and spray,

With the shallows at play,

Dancing under and over the rock-ribbed way,

Kiss each ridge where her golden-laced sandals alight

When the soul of her coming turns midnight to day.

But, hush! They have changed to a song of the sea.

It is night on the ocean,

Dark night as may be,

And a tender emotion

Steals over the wild waters clasped by the lea.

A Christmas Medley.



THE WAITS.

Drawn by L. C. Hensley.

Forsaken of God lie the billows that rolled
 Neath the feet of the Stainless that walked them of old,
 And the dream of her trouble disturbs the great deep
 Where her waves their time keep
 With a rush and a leap,
 For I hear how the waters breathe hard in their sleep.

Slow, slow dies the melody; low sobs the wind;
 And faint grow the meteor-thoughts flashed through the mind.
 The viol is hushed. Hark! a harp-string has flown;
 And the bugle whose tone is,
 Not sweet when alone, is,
 By the desperate bugleman,
 Leader and fugleman,
 Fearfully blown!

No more is the dreaming, no more the delight;
 Good night, kind Aunt Janet—dear Charlie, good night!

ELEANORA L. HERVEY.

ABOUT HOUSEHOLD GAMES.



HAT particular phrase, 'grown-up people,' is a vile one, as vile as 'beautified Ophelia;' but the mother-tongue refuses to supply me with one that more adequately expresses the meaning to be conveyed. There is a comprehensiveness in the expression which peculiarly fits it for the place which it occupies. So let it stand.

I am not going to say anything at present about the decay of genuine 'play' in our day, and the substitution of science in its place. Purposely I exclude from my little paper a host of recently invented games, most ingeniously constructed, which are sold by the toy-dealers. Many of them, as exercises of patience, perseverance, and skill, have great merit; but they are for the most part unmitigatedly dull. This is a hard-working, book-reading age, and our pastimes should not call for mental exertion

scarcely less exacting than that demanded by work and reading. On the contrary, they should provide thorough relaxation. Some modern games frighten me; their names are so hard, and they look so horribly 'scientific' (there's the 'Icosian' fellow for instance). I don't know much about them, and I would rather not be told.

Parlour croquet, parlour billiards, and bagatelle, are pleasant little chatty games, in which you walk about and use your arms. But what are they all, compared with the ancient games they have in some measure supplanted? I speak of what we call Christmas games; but

'All the old honour has from Christmas gone,
 Or gone, or dwindled down to some odd games
 In some odd nooks.'

Possibly there is not one among my readers who knows what the games called the 'Feather,' or 'Jack's alive,' were like; though doubtless they can do the *solitaire*, and take part in a charade. I mention these games because they were exclusively simple; and their grand aim was to make people laugh. I remember

once entering an old-fashioned room where half a score of people were sitting in a circle, trying to keep up the feather. The feather was of the lightest possible kind. Having been launched

in the air, it was everybody's duty to take care that it did not fall upon him or her, under pain of a forfeit. It was to be kept up by gentle blowing. Now grant that sensible, grave and



serious people may indulge in play of this kind (learned doctors and philosophers have, ere now, been caught in the act), and tell me who will resist laughing. It is so essentially ludicrous. There is the feather, floating downward like a snow-flake. Everything depends upon your keeping your countenance, as actresses say; and to keep your countenance just at the required moment, with all the players looking at you, is what you find to be most difficult. However, you make a vigorous effort; you distend your cheeks, and struggle bravely with the irresistible and growing tendency to burst into a large guffaw. Still the feather floats down; the breath will not come, and the end is a humiliating surrender, followed by the payment of a forfeit. There! if you want a little hearty fun some evening this December, get a feather, reader, and set your friends to keep it up.

Jack's alive is inferior. You know how a thin strip of wood, which has been well lighted and the flame extinguished, continues to smoulder. Well, you reduce one to such a state, and then pass it round, saying, 'Jack's alive.' A forfeit is claimed from the person in whose hand the spark expires. 'How ridiculous!' says the reader; and I grant the fact; but erudite people have been known to discover a vein of uproarious merriment, hitherto foreign to them, or certainly dormant, in playing it. The eagerness to get rid of the dying fire; the deliberation with which the two words are pronounced while the fire burned tolerably brightly, make the interest of the pastime.

That wise and witty archbishop, the late Richard Whately, was wont to amuse himself and others at dinner-tables by pencilling upon little scraps of paper little stories; giving them to

his right-hand neighbour to read, and instructing him to *tell* the story to the next, and so on, until it came back to the gentleman immediately on the left, who had to *write* what he was told, for comparison with the original. De Quincey, when a boy, had to do much the same thing with Mr. H——'s sermons, and did it wonderfully well; but every man at a dinner-table is not a De Quincey, and, consequently, the archbishop used to find his stories oftentimes almost unrecognisable. This was only the archbishop's method of playing an old game, once popular, but now fallen into disuse, having given place to imbecile printed conversation-cards, in which there is no possible opportunity for the exercise of wit, memory, or ability of any sort.

The game of cross questions and crooked answers may be very amusing; but to be so it must be played by people of ready wit, who know each other well, and consequently are enabled to put pertinent questions, and give droll answers. The whole fun of the game lies in the fact that each player gets the answer to his neighbour's question, instead of to his own, and it very rarely happens that anything occurs to redeem it from a prosaic character. Yet it often serves its purpose, by promoting laughter when the players declare the questions they were asked, and the answers they received, after the following fashion, each in his turn. 'The question I was asked was, "Are you in love?" the answer I received was, "Yes; with myself."'



Something of this nature are the innumerable catch games common to Christmas parties. They are but trifles, and may look strange in type. But this is an article on trifles.

You know what is vulgarly called a *sell*. Well, of course, all these games are sells, in which the wit and ingenuity

of the vendors is pitted against the credulity of the people to be sold. When a gentleman in serious mood informs a lady that he can exercise over her understanding a magic influence of so potent a kind that she, though blindfolded, shall be able to tell precisely what he is doing, without any person speaking,

her curiosity is aroused; but I should recommend her not to endeavour to gratify it. Perfidious bachelors have been known, ere now, after a wonderful pantomime, generally supposed to be necessary for the invocation of the spirit of mesmerism, terminating in the gentle closing of the patient lady's eyes, with many assurances that they must be kept closed, or the charm will be broken, to produce from waistcoat pockets forked sprigs of mistletoe, and to do—well, what do gentlemen usually do when they find a lady under the mistletoe? Of course, mamma is very angry; of course everybody laughs a great deal, and nobody, not even the lady who is *facile princeps*, can deny that she has been mesmerised, and is in a position to declare what was being done by a certain impertinent young—let us say captain (if only of volunteers)—while her eyes were closed.

Considerable ingenuity is required for the execution of these tricks, both to allay suspicion, and for the invention of new forms; for it of course follows that they are soon discovered, and then become useless. I remember seeing a number of little people at a merry 'breaking up' party thrown into the utmost perplexity by two of their school-fellows. It is a very easy matter to deceive unsuspecting young ladies and gentlemen of the ages of twelve, thirteen, and fourteen; but older people have been known to rack their brains in the fruitless effort to discover how, among a mixed company, one lady going behind a screen could tell to which one another pointed. It does occur to them that there is confederacy; but they are as often prepared to declare that there is no possible means by which they can do it, even under these circumstances, except that the lady behind the screen has a peep-hole. Whereupon she is sent into the vestibule, if there be one, or the next room, and never fails on the question being put. It takes people a long time to see what an ingenious use may be made of the word and in putting questions. How much may be done by signalling the *person who spoke last* before the confederate went into seclusion; or what significance may be given to a question of the nature of the one that preceded it. Many tricksters with the aid of these little resources have made merriment for a whole party, ere now. Very simple little games they are; but they serve the purpose for which they are intended.

Then there is that mystic scissors

game. Look at it. Here we sit all in a row. We are intent upon the business of passing up and down a pair of scissors, and as each one passes them to the next player she says, 'I give you my scissors open'; and they are received, and there is a cry of 'a forfeit! a forfeit!' which has to be paid; but why, the unfortunate player can in no way discover; for she observes that the next one hands them on, and is not asked for a forfeit, though really there seems no difference in the two methods of procedure. It is at length declared to be unfair, and so on; till some at last awakened player sees the trick, and cries, 'Oh, why you have to cross your arms like scissors when they are given to you open, and keep them straight when they are shut!' and of course is instantly made to pay half a dozen forfeits for having prematurely disclosed the secret, and made it public, to the utter destruction of all the fun in the game. But if those who discern it keep that still tongue which is proverbially understood to make a wise head, the game becomes exciting as the number who have to pay forfeits diminishes, till at last there is perhaps a solitary one in the row who alone fails to pass the scissors in an inoffensive way, trying them 'open' and 'shut,' always with the same result—always followed by demands for forfeits and excessive laughter.

There is no limit to this sort of game. There is 'the cook who doesn't like peas.' Well now, that phrase might bear its own explanation; but I have known pockets emptied of knives and handkerchiefs, and every description of article which could be deposited as surety for the just performance of the task imposed for offences against the laws of the game. The cook, having a distate for peas, there is a consultation as to what vegetables will suit her; and those who recommend 'potatoes' and 'turnips,' or anything which has the letter p in it, are very properly fined.

Some years ago I used to spend a part of each Christmas at a house where games of this sort formed a part of the merry evenings; and for weeks before December 25 the inmates were wont to exercise their ingenuity in getting up games; for be it understood, one was never serviceable twice with the same party for players.

There is a game reputed to be of Grecian origin, still popular in the northern counties—all old games and antique customs linger longest there—played in this wise: One player, having been decided upon by the drawing of

lots, or other similar means, kneels down and buries his face in sofa cushions or drapery, extending his hands palm uppermost on his back. The other players pass in regular order, administering a smart succession of sharp slaps. It is the duty of the kneeling and, so to speak, blinded player, to detect one of the others, and pronounce his name directly he has slapped. Until this is done he has to kneel on and endure. It will be readily conceived that a very delicate perception of touch would be required; in fact, it is so delicate that it is merely a matter of guess-work.

Wherein the fun—supposing there to be any—lies, it is quite impossible to say; and nobody will, I suppose, call it a scientific game. This once enjoyed an enormous popularity under the name it still retains of 'hot cockles.' It is spoken of in ancient books, and still more ancient MSS.; but everybody has unfortunately forgotten to tell us how it came to be so enigmatically designated. Gay says—

'As at Hot Cockles once I laid me down,
And felt the weighty hand of many a clown.
Buxoma gave a gentle tap, and I
Quick rose, and read soft mischief in her eye.'



This little stanza suggests what is possibly the chief hope of the unfortunate player whose hands are beaten; he may, by naming his friend, after receiving a 'gentle tap,' be as fortunate as Gay, when the chubby fingers of Buxoma acted as balm to his clown-beaten palms. But then, at what a cost he purchased his relief; for would not the fair Buxoma immediately have to adapt herself to the recumbent posture and the slaps from which he had escaped.

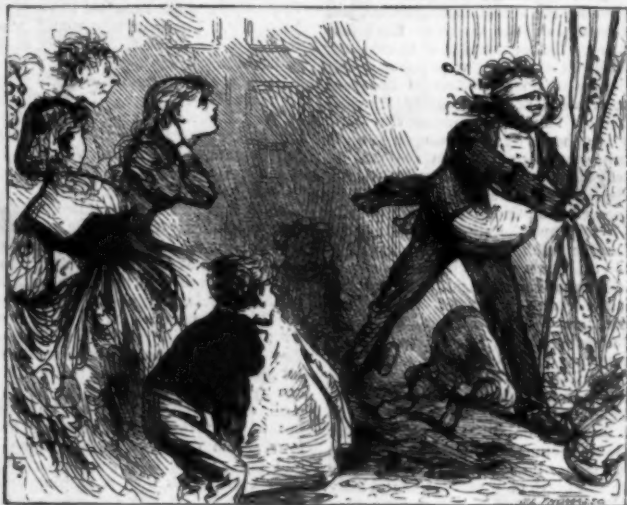
There is a catch game of this sort, called 'hot cockles for two;' the point of the game lying in two players agreeing to go down together, whereupon one rises noiselessly, and slaps the other, who of course accuses everybody but the person supposed to be his partner in affliction.

These games must be held to be a sort of horse play, and therefore objectionable; fortunately they are declining. 'Hot cockles' might, were it not for the fact that foes hit very hard, and friends

are afraid of hitting less hard, for fear it should lead to detection, enable a man to discover who loved him and who didn't; but what an opportunity it would give for the 'payment of old scores.' It would be as good as a shining match under the pretext of football playing. Do schoolboys play as lungesomely as ever? Talking of horse play, I remember what violent games we used to have in winter. Plato, is it not, who says that a boy is the most vicious of all wild beasts? There's a good deal of truth in it, too. I saw a lot of lads playing a game known as touch-cap, not long ago. This was how it was

played. A lad stood at a post with his cap over his face. Cautiously, a big fellow—I am sure he was a bully—went up and touched it. 'Who was it?' one asked. 'Simmons,' said the lad. 'No,' was the reply; and then they all (there were at least twelve to one) set to knock and beat him with knotted handkerchiefs and leathern thongs, while he ran thirty yards and back again; and some of the fellows waited by the way, and caught him huge whacks. That sort of play (!) used to be very prevalent; but it is rarely seen now.

Commend me to proverbs. I don't mean acting proverbs, which are ordi-



narily very dull. They are seldom well acted; an immense wardrobe is required to dress for them; there are unpleasant delays, and only the few act, while the many look on. Now I object to that upon principle. To be good, a game must include all who wish to play. Proverbs in the good old style does this. It is a quiet cosy game; we used to place it at the head of 'sitting still' games. I mean that sort of proverbs in which one person 'goes out,' while the others determine what it shall be, and give the words out to be introduced in the answers to the questions put. There is scope for genius there. When you get an awkward word, a particular monosyllable, conspicuous by its infrequent use in common conversation, look

what invention, prompt and subtle, is required to bring it in naturally. Such a word, you know, as 'bush' or 'devil.' Why, a novice ignominiously betrays the whole proverb by it; but your good player introduces half a dozen words from other proverbs equally exceptional in character, and with the skill of a fencer parries the question, or sends the asker on a wrong track.

To what fun-loving spirit, what genial Grecian, does the world stand indebted for blind man's buff? Would that I knew it, that I might immortalise it in capitals on this page. Was ever game so simple? In the interests of mirth I agree, my dear Clorinda, that you should apply your handkerchief to my eyes, deprive me of a sovereign sense; having done so, I

submit, still in the interests of fun, that you should pinch, pull, push, twist, turn, twirl, cajole, coax, cry 'fire! fire!' and otherwise delude, deceive, and maltreat me. I will turn, and turn, and turn, and still go on, doing my best to catch you; and when I do so I shall have the privilege of the blind, and shall pass my fingers over your face, as Nydia passed hers over that of Glancus. I shall know you, be assured. I shall name you, be also assured; I shall apply to your eyes the bandage; and then—why it is Christmas, and there is mistletoe on the ceiling, and I, too, can deceive.

Blind man's buff, or hood man blind, is at once the oldest, most popular, and charming of our English Christmas games. Rather romping, it is true, and I believe there are very polite people who refuse to play at it. I hope the preservation of their dignity (?) compensates for the merriment they lose. It is a homely game, not open to quite such grave objections on the part of Lady Blarney and Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs as those ladies discovered, on finding the Vicar's family playing hunt the slipper at neighbour Flamborough's; but there are people who think it nearly as bad. It is clearly a Christmas luxury; and, like any other rich accompaniment of the season, should be taken sparingly. Too much plum-cake is not good for Tom; and the same may be said of blind man's buff. It should come in with the holly and the ivy; and when they are taken down from the wall it should depart, and be no more seen or heard till another winter brings another Christmas. But that first game, how charming it is! The pent-up mirth of a year seems suddenly to be let loose, and it rushes down in a wonderful torrent, like that which tears along the river when the snows melt. Sir Walter Scott says,

'A Christmas gambol oft would cheer

A poor man's heart through half the year.'

And what gambol so cheerful as this, with its deep-toned laughter, dying now and again into a solemn stillness (under the 'silent system,' during which you can hear the wind in the chimney and the rain on the roof, when the blind man feels his way along the wall to a corner where he hears the rustle of silk; but arrives only to find that the bird has flown. How the silence bewilders him! It is worse than the roar and the pinchings and pullings. Don't tell me that it is not polite. It is hearty and English; brimful of innocent mirthfulness. For

two thousand years it has been what it is now. There have been sacrilegious meddlers who have sought to improve it; but they couldn't do it. It is almost the one solitary game which has defied time. It stands immutable; and children will, in after days, be putting away school books, singing,

'To-day's the saucer, to-morrow's the cup,

The next day after we shall break up.'

And it would puzzle most of them to say which they liked best, cake or blind man's buff. See with what interest they watch the application of the bandage; and how they hold up their tiny fingers, and ask how many, so that they may be quite sure that there is no peep-hole. The man who would peep would pick a pocket. He ought to be pilloried for an hour.

Talking of peeping, allow me to give, in parenthesis, a passage I met with in 'Tusser Redivivus,' anent the subject; and another sport, produced by 'blinding' a man. 'There was, years ago, in the age of cock-fighting, a custom prevalent on Shrove Tuesday of "threatening the fat hen," as it was called, a most brutal practice. One of the methods was to sling a hen at a man's back, and tie to his ankles horse bells; other men were then blindfolded, and, with cudgels in their hands, they chased the fellow about some large enclosure. The fellow with the hen shifting as well as he can they follow the sound, and sometimes hit him and his hen; other times, if he can get behind one of them, they thrash each other well favourably; but the jest is, the maids are to blind the fellows, which they do with their aprons; and the cunning baggages will endear their sweethearts with a peeping-hole while the others look out as sharp to hinder it.' This was, after all, only a sort of boisterous blind man's buff, the ordinary practice of tying up one man's eyes and leaving the rest free being inverted. It is now obsolete; the only relic of it remaining being occasionally got up by speculators, who attract a multitude of people to see men hunt a pig bearing a bell. Whoever strikes it is to have it; but as all the men have corresponding bells, and as piggy goes away and lies quietly down while these move about, the result is that they thrash one another, but nobody wins the prize. I saw this game played one Christmas, in a country town, in presence of an eager and admiring throng.

To return. I ignore 'shadow buff' and 'buff in the chair,' and, in short, all the 'buffs' but the original one.

They are 'spurious,' as the advertisers say.

Did anybody ever try to play the game by daylight? I did once, when we were snowed-up in a country house, and time hung heavy on our hands; but it was a most wretched failure. Artificial light seems as necessary for it as for a pantomime. *Mots* that in the evening pass for wit, fall dead upon the ear; people won't laugh, in fact, they can't do it, over the game in the day-time. It is at night, after a lounging, gossiping morning, a ramble in the park with dog and gun, and an early dinner in the fading light, that it ought to be played. The knowledge that it is snowing, or raining, or freezing very hard outside adds something to the zest with which it is played.

It is so with most of these household games. There is 'turn the trencher,' a capital game; all vivacity under the lamp, but miserably dull at mid-day. Of the myriad forfeit games this is probably the best. The whole circle is kept on the *qui vive*. Who will be called next? What is a fair spin? I confess I don't know. I have seen ladies give the trencher just the faintest idea of a twist, and when the motion that resulted was half over, call, with a most provoking coolness a number, with the greatest certainty of a forfeit being incurred. But then, I dare say, the owner of the number deserved it; and of course he had the power to retaliate there and then. It is a laughing, gossiping game, that goes on rapidly; and all attempts at 'copious conversation' are frustrated; for only let it be seen that a lady or gentleman is interested in talking to a neighbour, and 'they are immediately called out, and thus separated. But it is in the delicacy of touch required to insert the finger-tips under the settling trencher, the agility of movement, and the graceful stooping posture that it necessitates, that the greatest charms lie. Nowhere does a graceful woman have a better opportunity of displaying her grace, and 'showing her paces,' as somebody once said, to an admiring circle, than when she has to take up a trencher; and, certainly, nowhere does a clownish gait and awkwardness make so unfortunate a display of itself. Of course there is a forfeit every time the player fails to take up the trencher before it is still; and as this occurs pretty often, the mistress of the game soon fills her basket with those miscellaneous articles, the redemption of which is to take place by-and-by.

Forfeits are, in the abstract, very

good. They enter into hundreds of Christmas games; and the performance of penalties imposed upon those who incur them might be amusing. I say *might* be, because, as a rule, it is nothing of the kind; on the contrary, it is generally the most lamentably weak exhibition which can be made by a set of people 'doing their best to be merry.' Anything more absolutely absurd, not to use a stronger adjective, than the majority of tasks commanded to be performed by the players, cannot be imagined. Of course it would be too much to expect anything very great. But good taste and mirth might be combined in them. Probably it is to the fact that they seldom or never have been, that a good many wholesome, pleasant games have decayed. You can't cry forfeits by the books. They must arise out of the circumstances, and be regulated by the ability and character of the individual who is to perform the penitentiary act. I never had the good fortune to be one of a party where the forfeit crying wasn't a failure, where almost everybody was not ordered to do something they could not do, and where mamma didn't interpose, with good reason, and save her daughter from being made uncomfortable by some imposition as silly as it was inappropriate.

This may be thought to strike a fatal blow at the root of all forfeit games. But it is not so. To incur the forfeit is in itself quite sufficient, without ulterior consequences. Of course it must be demanded, and atonement may be insisted upon, when practicable.

We are somewhat in advance of the French in our household games. We seem to cling to them more, and to be able to extract merriment from trifles they would consider insignificant. There are, nevertheless, some games described in '*L'Almanach des Jeux de Société*,' which might be Anglicised with advantage to our common stock. I don't mean any of their complimentary games or their intricate ones. Intricacy, so far from being a merit in English eyes, is of itself a great defect, unless it brings a large result, and this is scarcely the case. They have a game called 'the secretary,' which I once played with some clever people. It was a good game intellectually, and there was some merriment in it. It had the advantage of being playable in daylight, too. If I describe it, it may, some of these Christmas mornings, serve to wile away, a morning hour in some country house.

A secretary is appointed, who distri-

butes to every player a blank piece of paper. Each one writes his name, and returns it. The papers are mixed, and again distributed; when everybody writes something under the name concerning the character, &c., of the owner of it. Once again they are collected, mixed, and read by the secretary. Nobody knows who it is who has satirised or complimented, as the case may be; and, if the players are clever, the result is amusing.

Yet a word. I have not mentioned cards. They are not good playfellows in my sense of Christmas play. Speculation, *vingt-et-un*, and 'beggar my neighbour,' are lively, but only moderately so. Play is to them what a family country dance is to a stately set of quad-

rilles. It is to games played in the house-place that I look back with greatest pleasure. Games that made the at other times silent eloquent, and the dull amusing; that made the eyes sparkle and the cheek glow. The party with whom I played them—we called ourselves the Anti-Scrooge Society—broke up long ago. Some of its members are no longer seen, some perished in battle, some went on the wrong tack, some are in strange lands under strange skies, and some upon the seas; but never comes the time when we weave the holly round the Christmas hearth, far or near, that the recollection of those games does not come back to us.

J. D. C.



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